NATION

23-year-old kills five, including four of his family

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BUSINESS

India imports €49B of Russian oil in 3rd year of Ukraine war

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SPORTS

Eng, Afghanistan eye victory to stay in CT

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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈہ روزنامہ بنگلور

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‘Delhi lost ₹2,000 cr due to liquor policy’

The CAG report, one of the 14 pending documents, was tabled by BJP CM Rekha Gupta

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Delhi suffered losses over Rs 2,000 crore due to 2021-2022 excise policy for reasons ranging from weak policy framework to deficient implementation, according to a CAG report tabled in the Assembly on Tuesday.

The most significant loss, amounting to Rs 941.53 crore, stemmed from the flawed opening of liquor vends in non-conforming municipal wards, which violated the Master Plan Delhi-2021. These areas were not approved for liquor outlets, yet the excise policy mandated at least two retail vends per ward. As a result, licences were issued for these vends without proper approval from the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), leading to the waiver of licence fees following a court order, further exacerbating the revenue shortfall.

Another Rs 890 crore was lost due to the excise department’s failure to re-tender surrendered licences from March 2022 to July 2022. Despite several licence holders relinquishing their licences, no re-tendering process was initiated, resulting in a lack of excise revenue from these zones.

Minister Parvesh Verma and Delhi CM Rekha Gupta in the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Additionally, the department granted a waiver of Rs 144 crore to liquor retailers due to Covid-related closures from December 2021 to January 2022. This move was deemed irregular, as no provisions in the original tender document allowed for such waivers. Despite the finance and excise departments’ objections, the waiver was approved by then-deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, citing similar relief granted to hotels and restaurants during the lockdown.

The report flagged procedural violations in the licensing process. Wholesalers with manufacturing interests controlled nearly one-third of the liquor trade in Delhi, risking monopolistic practices. The wholesale margin was raised from 5 per cent to 12 per cent to offset higher licence fees, but the justification for this change raised questions about potential conflicts of interest.

Furthermore, retail liquor licences were granted without thorough background checks or financial vetting, despite significant investment requirements. No qualifications were set for retailers operating in large zones, where investments of up to Rs 100 crore were needed for 27 vends. This lack of scrutiny was deemed a critical flaw in policy implementation.

The CAG report also raised concerns about the alteration of expert committee recommendations by the Group of Ministers (GoM), led by Sisodia. The committee had recommended that wholesale operations be managed by a government agency, but this suggestion was overturned in favour of private wholesalers. This change allowed private entities to monopolise liquor distribution, with just three wholesalers controlling 71 per cent of the city’s supply of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and foreign liquor.

In addition to these policy issues, key revenue-related decisions were made without Cabinet approval or consultation with the Lieutenant Governor, including relaxation of actions against defaulter licensees, waivers in licence fees, and changes to the maximum retail price calculation for foreign liquor.

The excise department issued licences to entities that either failed to provide valid quality test reports or had outdated reports. In 51 per cent of foreign liquor test cases, the reports were missing or over a year old. *—PTI*

LoP Atishi with AAP MLAs protests over removal of BR Ambedkar’s portraits from CM office in New Delhi on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

21 of 22 AAP MLAs expelled from Assembly

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Delhi Assembly has suspended 21 Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs, including Leader of Opposition Atishi, for three days due to disruptions during Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena’s inaugural address. The suspension, moved by Delhi Public Works Department Minister Parvesh Verma, was passed via a voice vote, with the affected MLAs barred from assembly proceedings on 27 and 28 February.

As the session commenced, Atishi and fellow AAP legislators protested the alleged removal of BR Ambedkar’s portrait from the chief minister’s office, accusing the BJP-led government of disrespecting the revered figure.

With AAP holding 22 seats in the assembly, only Okhla MLA Amantullah Khan was not suspended due to his absence. Following the suspension, the 21 MLAs staged further protests inside the assembly complex, brandishing portraits of Ambedkar and chanting slogans. *—PTI*

Class 10, 12 students get free KSRTC bus travel

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation on Tuesday announced that it will provide free bus travel for SSLC (class 10) and second PUC (class 12) students during their annual exams. Students can avail of this facility by presenting their “Examination Admission Ticket” during the examination periods—1 to 20 March for the second PUC and 21 March to 4 April for SSLC. *—PTI*

SC bars cops from taking action against Lakshya

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Supreme Court has intervened to bar Karnataka Police from taking any coercive action against badminton player Lakshya Sen, his family members, and coach U Vimal Kumar, amid allegations of forging birth certificates. A bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and K Vinod Chandran issued a notice to the Karnataka government and the complainant, M G Nagaraj, who accused Sen’s parents and others of manipulating birth records. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Class 10 CBSE exam to be held twice a year now

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has approved draft norms to conduct Class-10 board exams twice a year, starting in 2026. The first phase will be held from 17 February to 6 March, and the second from 5 to 20 May. Both exams will cover the full syllabus, with students assigned the same examination centres for both phases. Exam fees will be collected for both phases during the application process. The exams will also serve as supplementary exams, with no special exams to be conducted. The move aligns with the National Education Policy (NEP), which aims to reduce the high-stakes nature of board exams by offering students two opportunities per year. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

3 fishermen held off K’taka coast after fleeing Oman

UDUPI, 25 FEB

The Indian Coast Guard and Coastal Security Police apprehended three individuals aboard a foreign fishing vessel near St Mary’s Island, approximately eight nautical miles off the Malpe coast. The boat, identified as the Omanian Fishing Boat Shattaf Launch Manufacturing, was reported by a local fisherman who alerted the authorities. The arrested men—James Franklin Moses (50) from Ramanathapuram, Robinston (50), and Derose Alphonso (38) from Tirunelveli—face charges under the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, and the Maritime Zones of India Act, 1981. Preliminary investigations revealed they fled Oman after being mistreated by their employer. The fishermen were remanded in judicial custody after appearing in court on Monday, while the local fisherman who raised the alarm will be recognised for his vigilance. *—PTI*

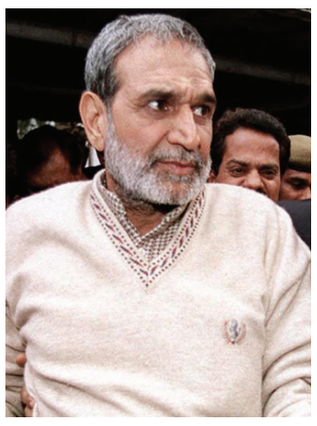
JUSTICE DELAYED NOT DENIED

Ex-MP Sajjan gets lifer in 1984 anti-Sikh riots

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

A Delhi court has sentenced former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar to life imprisonment in connection with the murder of Jaswant Singh and his son, Tarundeep Singh, during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Special Judge Kaveri Baweja delivered the ruling on Tuesday for crimes committed on 1 November 1984, with a more detailed verdict to follow.

Kumar had been convicted on 12 February, and the court had requested a report from Tihar Central Jail regarding his psychiatric evaluation, in compliance with a Supreme Court order applicable to cases involving capital punishment. While murder carries a maximum sentence of death, the court opted for life imprisonment as the minimum punishment. The prosecution, along with Singh’s wife, sought the maximum penalty for Kumar, who is currently incarcerated at Tihar jail. Initially, the case was registered at the Punjabi Bagh police station but was later taken over by a special investigation team. Charges against Kumar were framed on 16 December 2021 after the court established a “prima facie” case against him.



Sajjan Kumar appears in the Patiala House Court in New Delhi on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Evidence presented by the prosecution indicated that Kumar led a violent mob, which looted, committed arson, and destroyed Sikh properties following the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The Nanavati Commission report revealed that there were 587 FIRs related to the riots, resulting in only 28 convictions. Kumar has pending appeals concerning his prior convictions and life sentence in the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

IT raids in City’s Prestige offices over tax evasion

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

The Income Tax (IT) Department carried out simultaneous raids at four locations linked to the Prestige Group in Bengaluru on Tuesday. The operation targeted the company’s headquarters and offices, including those at MG Road and Shivajinagar.

Over 50 IT officials from Bengaluru, Delhi, and Goa arrived in private vehicles to execute the searches early in the morning. Sources indicate the raids were prompted by discrepancies in tax payments by the prominent real estate developer. An official, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed that the department is scrutinising financial records and documents to assess potential tax evasion. Prestige Group IS a major player in residential and commercial real estate. Neither Prestige Group nor the investigation agencies have released an official statement. *—Salar News*

SC bins HDK’s plea seeking quashing of corruption case

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Supreme Court on Tuesday dismissed a plea by former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy, seeking to quash proceedings in a corruption case related to the de-notification of two plots of land. The bench, comprising Justices Dipankar Datta and Rajesh Bindal, refused to entertain Kumaraswamy’s plea against an October 2020 order of the Karnataka High Court, which had rejected his request to quash the proceedings.

The case centres on a private complaint filed by MS Mahadeva Swamy, who alleged that Kumaraswamy, during his tenure as chief minister between June 2006 and October 2007, de-notified two plots of land in Halagevaderahalli Village, Bengaluru, for personal gain. The complaint was filed under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

HD Kumaraswamy **PHOTO: PTI**

- Kumaraswamy’s counsel had argued that the case could not proceed without prior sanction, as per Prevention of Corruption Act.

Kumaraswamy’s counsel had argued that the case could not proceed without prior sanction, as per amendments to Section 19(1)(b) of the Prevention of Corruption Act in 2018. They contended that the special judge should not have taken cognisance of the case without such sanction, particularly as Kumaraswamy was no longer in office when the cognisance was taken. However, the Karnataka High Court had ruled there was sufficient material to proceed with the case and had rejected the plea for quashing the proceedings, citing no abuse of process.

The Supreme Court’s dismissal of the plea means the proceedings against Kumaraswamy will continue. *—PTI*

NACHIYAAR QUITS BJP AMID TN LANGUAGE DISPUTE

CHENNAI, 25 FEB

Former actor and politician Ranjana Nachiyaar has resigned from her membership in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), citing the imposition of a three-language policy as misguided. Her departure comes amid escalating tensions regarding language education in Tamil Nadu.

Ranjana Nachiyaar **PHOTO: X**

AIADMK MP M Thambidurai accused the ruling DMK government of politicising the language issue ahead of upcoming elections. He condemned the state’s stance on the New Education Policy (NEP), highlighting that while the government permits numerous CBSE schools, which teach multiple languages, it seems resistant to the inclusion of Hindi.

“The current state government allows various CBSE schools; let Stalin insist on their removal, and then the language problem would be solved,” Thambidurai remarked.

He suggested that the government’s approval of CBSE schools contradicts their call for a two-language policy and that the language debate is merely a strategy to attract votes.

Protests erupted on Monday, led by DMK cadres near the Trichy central bus stand in Tiruchirappalli. *—ANI*

REINSTATES RJD LEADER

No place for indecency in Parl, Assembly: SC

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Supreme Court has emphasised that there is no room for aggression or indecency in parliamentary proceedings, asserting that members must show complete respect and deference towards each other. It also stated that the right to speak within the House cannot be used to insult, humiliate, or defame fellow members, ministers, or the Chair itself.

The court’s ruling came in the case of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MLC Sunil Kumar Singh, who was expelled from the Bihar Legislative Council for sloganeering against Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in February 2024. While criticising Singh’s conduct, the Court ruled that his expulsion was excessive and set aside the decision.

The bench, comprising Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh, highlighted that the effective functioning of democratic processes depends on respectful debates and discussions, and that such actions must uphold the institution’s dignity. The Court underscored that constitutional courts have a role in scrutinising the proportionality of punishments imposed on members, ensuring that such actions are just and not disproportionate.

The Court also noted that removing a member from the House impacts not only the individual but also the electorate they represent, disrupting the democratic process. It cautioned against excessively harsh punishments that could undermine democracy, urging courts to act with restraint while ensuring that justice is in line with constitutional values. Singh’s expulsion followed a motion passed by the Bihar Legislative Council after his disruptive actions, including mimicking the Chief Minister and questioning the ethics committee’s competence. *—PTI*

K’taka MLAs to get recliners for nap in Assembly session

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Legislators will get recliners from this session onwards to take a nap post lunch, Karnataka Assembly Speaker UT Khader has said.

The measure was taken to prevent absenteeism of MLAs after lunch as many would skip the proceedings of the House for a nap.

“We have decided to hire 15 recliners on rent during the legislative session from 3 March to 21 March. We are not purchasing them considering it a wastage of money as they will lie unused rest of the year,” Khader told reporters on Monday.

He said these recliners will be removed once the session is over.

According to the Speaker, tea and coffee were arranged for the convenience of the legislators at the lobby outside the House. *—PTI*

HAL signs MoU with BEML for strategic projects

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with BEML Ltd to collaborate on leadership and technical training programmes. This partnership will focus on skill development and professional excellence. Under the agreement, HAL's Management Academy will design and deliver training in areas such as six sigma, quality, reliability, data analytics, and Industry 4.0, targeting induction, middle, and senior management levels. The collaboration will also include industrial visits, knowledge-sharing sessions, joint conferences, internships, and project-based learning for BEML professionals. This MoU marks a significant step in enhancing industry-academia collaboration, strengthening India's defence manufacturing sector, and equipping professionals with advanced skills and knowledge. *—PTI*

Police Chief warns against vehicle thefts in City

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

With cases of vehicle thefts rising in the city, Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda has urged people to be alert and take adequate preventive measures. Addressing a press conference on Tuesday, Dayananda said two-wheelers are increasingly being stolen to use for criminal acts. "We have intensified surveillance on vehicle thefts and apprehended several offenders. However, owners must also take responsibility for securing their vehicles," he said. Despite repeated advisories, many vehicle owners continue to be negligent, contributing to the growing number of thefts, the Commissioner said. He advised two-wheeler owners to park in designated areas, use proper locking systems, install GPS tracking devices and where possible, park their vehicles within their residential compounds. ***—Salar News***

4 held for trying to sell newborn for Rs 60,000

TUMAKURU, 25 FEB

Four people have been arrested near here for attempting to sell a newborn child, police said on Tuesday. The Kunigal police registered a case based on a complaint by Huchcha Rangamma, the senior supervisor in Woman and Child Welfare Department, Kunigal. Rangamma stated an unmarried woman gave birth to a male child at the Kunigal Government Hospital on February 20. She, her partner Srinanda from Magadi Taluk who fathered the child, and an Anganwadi worker Jyothi connived to sell the child to one Mubarak Pasha for Rs 60,000.*—PTI*

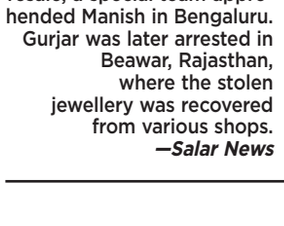


PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

2 arrested for Rs 63 lakh gold heist in City

BENGALURU, 25 FEBRUARY

Halasuru Gate Police have arrested two men for stealing gold ornaments worth Rs 63 lakh from the Konark Hallmarking and Assay Centre in Nagarathpet Cross. The accused, Manish Prajapat (20) from Rajasthan and Mahaveer Gurjar (22) from Delhi, were caught following an extensive investigation. Manish, employed at the centre for six months, stole the locker key and took 727 grams of gold jewellery sent by jewellers for hallmarking. After handing over the gold to Gurjar in Rajasthan for resale, a special team apprehended Manish in Bengaluru. Gurjar was later arrested in Beawar, Rajasthan, where the stolen jewellery was recovered from various shops. ***—Salar News***

Kannada activists arrested amid protest against border row

No buses between K'taka, M'rashtra for 4th day

BELAGAVI, 25 FEB

Pro-Kannada activists meet the injured bus conductor at a hospital in Belagavi on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

In the wake of tension prevailing in the border district of Belagavi and attacks on buses and their crew, services between Karnataka and Maharashtra have been suspended for fourth day, authorities said on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, both factions of the Karnataka Rakshana Vedike – T A Narayana Gowda and Praveen Shetty – staged demonstrations and the pro-Kannada activists courted arrest. They separately met conductor Mahadevappa Hukkeri and assured him of all possible assistance.

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy said the situation in Belagavi was normal. He said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has directed Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh and DGP Alok Mohan to speak to their counterparts in Maharashtra and ensure the safety of the buses and crew from both states.

Noting that the conductor who was assaulted is likely to be discharged tomorrow, Reddy said the POCSO case against him on Saturday was "false" and an afterthought.

The unrest was sparked by the assault on a bus conductor by a group of people for the former's refusal to converse with two passengers in Marathi.

"We have suspended bus services to Maharashtra since yesterday. The Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) has also stopped operating buses to Karnataka," said a senior officer of the North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC).

POCSO case withdrawn

Meanwhile, the parents of the minor girl on Tuesday withdrew the POCSO case they filed against Hukkeri at Marihal police station to protect "communal harmony". Belagavi Police Commissioner Ada Martin said they withdrew the case without any condition or pressure.

In a video released later, the mother of the girl said though injustice was meted out to their daughter, they withdrew the case as "it created tension between Kannadigas and Marathis in Belagavi".

A group of around eight people assaulted Hukkeri at Balekundri bus stand in Belagavi taluk for asking the girl and boy who was with her to ask for a ticket in Kannada language.

After the assault, the conductor filed a case with Marihal police.

The girl also filed a POCSO case against him, alleging that he made some vulgar gestures at her on the bus.a

Police Commissioner Martin transferred Marihal Inspector Gururaj Kalyanshetti for not informing his senior officers about the filing of the POCSO case. *—Salar News & Agencies*

The Ladle Mashak Dargah, a renowned pilgrimage site, holds historical and religious significance *PHOTO: SALAR*

HC allows Shiva Lingam's worship at contested dargah

KALABURAGI, 25 FEB

In a significant ruling ahead of Mahashivratri, the Kalaburagi High Court Bench has granted conditional permission to perform worship at the Shiva Lingam located within the Ladle Mashak Dargah in Kalaburagi's Aland. The court, which heard the petition on Tuesday, authorised worship from 2pm to 6pm on 26 February, with strict conditions.

Hindu organisation leaders had approached the court seeking permission to perform rituals at the Raghav Chaitanya Shiva Lingam within the dargah. Initially requesting permission for 500 devotees, the court limited the number to 15 individuals, excluding Siddalinga Swamiji, for the ceremony.

The Ladle Mashak Dargah, a renowned pilgrimage site, holds historical and religious significance. It houses the samadhi of Saint Raghav Chaitanya, guru of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, and a Shiva Lingam consecrated on the samadhi. Hindus have been offering prayers here for centuries. However, tensions arose in 2022 after the Shiva Lingam was allegedly desecrated, leading to violent clashes between communities.

In the ongoing legal battle, the Waqf Board denied the presence of a Shiva Lingam at the site. After site inspections and historical verification, the court ruled in favour of the Hindu petitioners.

The ruling has sparked mixed reactions, with some calling for greater interfaith harmony, while others stress the importance of maintaining religious sanctity. Kalaburagi District Collector Fauzia Tarannum has imposed a liquor ban in Aland Taluk from 11pm on 25 February until 6am on 27 February. *—Salar News*

Yemalur Road to see traffic diversion on Mahashivratri

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

The HAL Airport Traffic Police have announced traffic diversions due to the Mahashivratri festival and Ooru Habba celebrations at the Sri Shiva Temple on Yemalur Main Road. The restrictions will be in effect from 6am on Wednesday until 3pm on Thursday. During this period, Yemalur Main Road will be closed between Kodi Junction and Glory Juice Centre.

To mitigate disruption, alternative routes have been provided. Vehicles travelling from Yemalur Kodi towards Varthur Road can use Kempapura Main Road via Rohan Apartment Road. Those coming from Varthur Road are advised to take the reverse route through Rohan Apartment Road and Kempapura Main Road.The traffic police have urged the public to plan their commutes accordingly. *—Salar News*

The community leaders alleged the police threatened Rathod's mother and younger brother *PHOTO: SALAR*

Safety urged as State sees 3 jumbo attack deaths

BIDAR, 25 FEB

In three separate elephant attacks over two days, two people have died in State, prompting the Forest Ministe Eshwar Khandre to urge the public to follow safety guidelines. On Monday, a youth in Belur taluk, Hassan, was killed; and on Tuesday a woman in Kamasamudra, Kolar, succumbed to her injuries.

A 45-year-old woman, Manjula, was trampled to death by an elephant near Sakarasanahalli, under Donimadagu Grama Panchayat in Bangarpet taluk. The incident occurred in the early hours when Manjula stepped out of her house to attend nature's call.

Khandre expressed condolences to the victims' families, assuring that compensation would be provided. He emphasised the importance of staying alert, particularly in areas

near forests, as elephant movements are most common during mornings and evenings. The Minister acknowledged that elephant-human conflict has been a long-standing issue, exacerbated by deforestation and increasing wildlife numbers. In response, the government is strengthening measures such as tentacle and solar fencing, elephant moats, and railway barricades. Work on 78.917 km of railway barricades has been completed, with another 103 km planned for completion by 31 March, 2025. *—Salar News with Agencies*

Custodial death sparks protests in Kalaburagi

KALABURAGI, 25 FEB

Alleging police brutality in the death of Krishna Vithal Rathod, parents and relatives of the 26-year-old protested in front of the City Police Commissioner's office on Monday night. They claimed that he was taken into custody under the pretext of questioning in the missing case of a woman and was subjected to brutal torture.

A complaint was registered at Roja police station about the disappearance of a woman named Mainabai from Mizaguri Cross on 24 January. The police took Rathod into custody from Hadgil Haruti village for interrogation.

Leaders from the Banjara community also alleged that the police forcibly cremated the youth's body in front of his mother and brother. They, along with the deceased's family members, submitted a petition to DCP Kanika Sikrival, demanding justice for Rathod's family and punishment for those responsible.

The community leaders alleged the police, in an alleged bid to cover up the case, threatened Rathod's mother and younger brother Bhima to implicate them in a double murder case and forced them to give a statement that he died of a heart attack while on the way to a hospital in a police vehicle.

They alleged that the police also offered money to Krishna's family to hush up the matter.

Bhima alleged that police took him and his mother to the station around 3am on Sunday and made them sign on some blank sheets of paper.

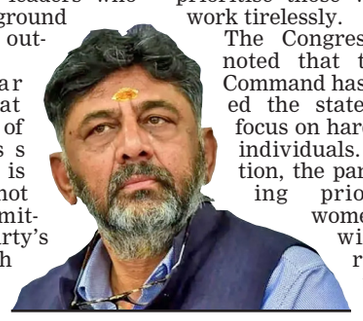
Kalaburagi Police Commissioner Dr Sharanappa SD did not answer calls from Salar News for his response. *—Salar News*

'Ground work must for party post'

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar stated that Congress would reward only those workers who demonstrate commitment at the grassroots level, not those who seek influence in Bengaluru. Speaking to reporters before leaving for New Delhi, Shivakumar emphasised the need for party members who work diligently at the taluk level rather than those who rely on lobbying with senior leaders.

He added, "If we grant positions of power, they must deliver results. We will focus on leaders who work on the ground and produce outcomes."



Shivakumar revealed that while the list of Congress office-bearers is ready, it has not yet been submitted to the party's High Command. He clarified that the state unit would replace individuals who are not engaged in active roles and prioritise those willing to work tirelessly.

The Congress leader noted that the High Command has instructed the state unit to focus on hardworking individuals. In addition, the party is giving priority to women, in line with the reservation policy. *—PTI*

MOVING SUV CATCHES FIRE

BENGALURU, 25 FEB:

Panic ensued near HMT Club in Jalahalli East on Monday when an SUV caught fire while in motion. The driver, noticing smoke, pulled over around 2 am and safely exited the vehicle. He alerted the police and fire department, who quickly extinguished the blaze. The vehicle sustained around 75 per cent damage, but fortunately, no injuries were reported.

Probe suggest the fire was caused by a spark from a faulty battery. *—Salar News*

State says Gruha Jyothi subsidy was paid in advance

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

The government has reassured that the subsidy for its flagship Gruha Jyothi scheme is being paid in advance to the Electricity Supply Companies (ESCOMs), with no intention of recovering the amount from consumers. Energy Minister K J George issued the clarification following a departmental meeting at Belaku Bhavana on Monday.

"There is a misconception that ESCOMs have requested the Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) to recover the Gruha Jyothi subsidy from consumers," George said. He emphasised that the Gruha Jyothi scheme, which promises free electricity up to 200 units for households, was announced with the assurance that the subsidy would be fully covered by the government. Accordingly, funds have been allocated in the budget, and since its launch in August 2023, the subsidy has been paid in advance to all ESCOMs. He explained that under the KERC (Subsidy Payment Mechanism) Rules, 2008, ESCOMs can collect subsidies from consumers only if the government fails to pay in advance, a provision that has been misinterpreted. *—ANI*

AGE FRAUD CASE

SC stays action against Lakshya Sen

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Supreme Court on Tuesday barred Karnataka police from taking any coercive steps against badminton player Lakshya Sen, his family members, and coach over allegations of forging birth certificates.

A bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and K Vinod Chandran issued notice to the government and the complainant MG Nagaraj who alleged birth certificates of Sen and his brother Chirag Sen were forged.

The court was hearing a plea challenging 19 February order of the High Court, which rejected the petitions filed by Sen, his family members, and his coach U Vimal Kumar.

The High Court ruled there was prima facie evidence warranting an investigation into the case.

The case stems from a complaint filed by Nagaraj, who alleged Sen's parents Dhirendra and Nirmala Sen, along with his brother, coach, and an employee of the Karnataka Badminton Association, were involved in falsifying the birth records. According to the complaint, the accused allegedly manipulated the birth certificates of the Sen brothers, reducing their age by approximately two-and-a-half years.

The alleged forgery was intended to allow them to participate in age-restricted badminton tournaments and avail government benefits.

Nagaraj supported his claims with documents obtained under RTI Act and requested the court to summon original records from the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in New Delhi. Based on this evidence, the court directed the High Grounds police station to conduct an investigation.

However, the petitioners moved the Karnataka High Court in 2022, securing an interim order that stalled the investigation.

The petitioners argued that the complaint and subsequent FIR were baseless, motivated, and intended to harass them. They alleged Nagaraj was acting out of personal vendetta, claiming his daughter had applied to join the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy in 2020 but was not selected after the evaluation process.

Kumar, a coach at the academy, was named in the complaint. *—PTI*

State to host GAFX in Bengaluru from 27 Feb

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Bengaluru will host GAFX 2025, India's premier AVGC-XR Conference, from February 27 to March 1. Organised by the Karnataka Government's ITBT department, the event will bring together the Animation, VFX, Gaming, Comics, and Extended Reality communities to foster innovation, knowledge-sharing, and strategic collaborations.

With an expected attendance of over 20,000, double that of previous editions, GAFX 2025 aims to be the most influential gathering of creators, developers, investors, and enthusiasts from the AVGC-XR ecosystem. The theme of this year's event is "The Future of Immersion: Experience. Explore. Disrupt."

Priyank Kharge, Karnataka's Minister for Electronics, IT, BT, and Rural Development, highlighted the state's role in driving innovation and transforming the digital media industry, blending human creativity with AI tools.

GAFX 2025 will feature several new elements, including a public-access expo, creative zone, immersive sessions with global industry leaders, an innovation zone, and the live finals of a national esports tournament. Major companies like Warner Brothers, ILM, Technicolor Group, and Nvidia will present at the event, showcasing India's talent and investment opportunities in the AVGC-XR sector. *—PTI*

- With an expected attendance of over 20,000,, GAFX 2025 aims to be the most influential gathering of creators, developers and enthusiasts from the AVGC-XR ecosystem.

Law experts appear before ONOE panel

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Former Law Commission of India chairperson Ritu Raj Awasthi appeared on Tuesday before the Joint Parliamentary Committee studying the two bills for simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls as the panel began consulting experts and stakeholders. IAS officer Niten Chandra, the secretary of the high-level Kovind committee, also shared his views with the panel. Former chief justice of India UU Lalit was scheduled to appear before the committee later in the day. EM Sudarsana Natchiappan, a senior advocate and former Congress MP who had headed in 2015 a parliamentary committee that favoured simultaneous polls, will also share his views with the panel. The parliamentary committee's agenda for the 25 February meeting was briefly listed as "interaction with legal experts". *—PTI*

Maharashtra govt raises DA of employees by 12%

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

The Maharashtra government on Tuesday issued an order increasing the dearness allowance (DA) of its employees by 12 per cent under the unrevised pay scale of the 5th Pay Commission, effective from 1 July, 2024. The DA revised from 443 per cent to 455 per cent will be paid in cash along with the salary for February 2025, including arrears for 1 July, 2024 to 31 January, 2025, as per a Government Resolution (GR). The DA hike is expected to benefit approximately 17 lakh employees, said an official from the state finance department. For grant-in-aid institutions and Zilla Parishad employees, the expenditure will be booked under the sub-heads specified for their financial assistance. *—PTI*

Lalu, children summoned in land-for-jobs scam

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

A Delhi court on Tuesday summoned former Union rail minister Lalu Prasad in connection with the land-for-jobs "scam". Special Judge Vishal Gogne also summoned Prasad's son and former Bihar minister Tej Pratap Yadav, and daughter Hema Yadav. The judge issued fresh summonses to the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) supremo's younger son and former Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav. The accused have been directed to appear before the court on 11 March. The case is related to Group D appointments made in the West Central Zone of the Indian Railways based in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, during Prasad's tenure as Union rail minister between 2004 and 2009 in return for land parcels gifted or transferred by the recruits in the name of the RJD supremo's family or associates, according to officials. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Court grants pre-arrest bail to AAP's Amanatullah

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

A Delhi court on Tuesday granted anticipatory bail to AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan, booked over the recent attack on a Delhi Police team at Jamia Nagar in the national capital. Granting the reprieve, special judge Jitendra Singh directed Khan to join the investigation. Delhi Police registered an FIR against the Okhla MLA in connection with the incident on 10 February and alleged he led a mob while aiding a proclaimed offender, accused in an attempt-to-murder case, to escape from custody. The alleged incident, police said, occurred when Delhi Police's Crime Branch attempted to arrest one Shabaz Khan. *—PTI*

1984 riot survivors seek death for Sajjan

Meanwhile, the court says age & satisfactory conduct saved Sajjan from death penalty

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

While victims, kin of slained persons and members of the community welcomed the life-term in jail awarded to Sajjan Kumar in a murder case related to 1984 anti-Sikh riots on Tuesday, they advocated capital punishment for the former legislator.

A special court while rejecting the plea for the crime falling in "rarest of rare" category handed out the life term to Kumar for the murders of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh on 1 November, 1984 during the anti-Sikh riots.

Jaswant's wife, who is the complainant in the case, and the state had sought death penalty for Kumar.

Jagdeep Singh Kalon, general secretary of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, expressed gratitude toward Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the judges for ensuring justice.

Kujeet Kaur, a survivor of the anti-Sikh riots, recalled her ordeal.

Gurlad Singh, who was leading the protest outside the Rouse Avenue district courts premises before the verdict, urged the government to challenge the order before a higher court to enhance the punishment to death sentence.

People celebrate after a Delhi court awarded life imprisonment to former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar in a murder case connected to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, in Kanpur, on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Age & satisfactory conduct saved Sajjan from death penalty: Court

A Delhi court on Tuesday awarded life imprisonment to former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar in a murder case connected to 1984 anti-Sikh riots, saying his old age and illness weighed in favour of sentence instead of death penalty.

Special judge Kaveri Baweja's verdict came over the killings of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh on 1 November, 1984.

The judge said the offences committed by Kumar were undoubtedly brutal and reprehensible but underscored certain mitigating factors, including his age of 80 years and illnesses that "weigh in favour of imposing a lesser sentence, instead of death penalty".

Nothing "adverse was reported about Kumar's behaviour" and his conduct was "satisfactory" according to a jail report, the court added. The judge fined Kumar with approximately Rs 2.4 lakh. *—PTI*

While the entire country was expecting a death penalty for Sajjan Kumar, he was awarded life imprisonment only. It was not an ordinary case of murder, it was a genocide of Sikhs carried out at the behest of his leader Rajiv Gandhi

—RP Singh, BJP national spokesperson

The wheels of justice have started moving. Several other senior Congress leaders, including one who was in the race to become Congress president, will soon meet their fate

—Amit Malviya, BJP IT department head

We believe that similar action will be taken against Jagdish Tytler and Kamal Nath in the coming days

— Manjinder Singh Sirsa, Delhi Minister

RIOTS THAT KILLED THOUSANDS

The 1984 anti-Sikh riots, also known as the 1984 Sikh massacre, was a series of organised pogroms against Sikhs in India following the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. Government estimates project that about 2,800 Sikhs were killed in Delhi and 3,350 nationwide, whilst other sources estimate the number of deaths at about 8,000–17,000.

1991: FIR lodged in the case.

8 Jul, 1994: Delhi court finds no sufficient evidence to initiate prosecution.

12 Feb, 2015: Govt forms special investigation team (SIT).

21 Nov, 2016: SIT tells court case requires further probe.

6 Apr, 2021: Kumar is arrested.

5 May, 2021: Police files chargesheet.

26 Jul: Court takes cognisance of chargesheet.

1 Oct: Court begins hearing arguments on charge.

16 Dec: Court frames charges of murder, rioting, other offences.

31 Jan, 2024: Court begins hearing final arguments.

8 Nov: Court reserves verdict.

12 Feb, 2025: Court convicts Kumar.

25 Feb: Kumar gets life-term imprisonment.

FOR REMARKS ON PM

People gave their mandate: Delhi LG takes a dig at Kejri

Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena, Arvind Kejriwal *PHOTO: X*

- Speaker Vijender Gupta expelled twelve AAP MLAs, including Atishi, for raising slogans against the LG during his address

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena has condemned Arvind Kejriwal's remarks about the Prime Minister, asserting that the people of Delhi have expressed their discontent through the recent Assembly election results. Kejriwal, head of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), was defeated in the New Delhi constituency and saw his party's seats drop to 22 in the 70-member Assembly, while BJP clinched 48 seats, marking a return to power in the capital after 26 years.

Saxena stated, "Kejriwal has made several inappropriate statements about the Prime Minister... His defeat in Delhi reflects the public's response." During the inaugural session of the newly elected Assembly, Saxena reaffirmed the BJP's commitment to governance centred on development, as articulated in the party's manifesto, the 'Viksit Delhi Sankalp Patra'.

In a turbulent first session, Speaker Vijender Gupta expelled twelve AAP MLAs, including Atishi, for raising slogans against the LG during his address. Atishi later defended the previous administration's excise policy, attributing revenue losses to the intervention of the LG and central agencies, which she claims stifled implementation and led to significant fiscal deficits.

The political landscape is set for profound changes as Saxena calls for a "corruption-free" administration, alongside measures aimed at women's empowerment and environmental rejuvenation, signalling a new chapter in Delhi's governance amid ongoing tensions between AAP and the BJP. *—PTI*

Ready for language war: Stalin convenes all-party meeting

CHENNAI, 25 FEB

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has asserted that the state is prepared to engage in "another language war," responding to the ongoing controversy over the alleged imposition of Hindi by the Centre. Addressing reporters, Stalin announced plans for an all-party meeting on March 5 to address the state's concerns regarding Lok Sabha delimitation, which threatens to reduce Tamil Nadu's representation from 39 to 31 seats due to successful population control measures.

Stalin emphasised the need for unity across political lines, highlighting that the threat of losing parliamentary seats could undermine Tamil Nadu's voice. He stated, "Our representation will reduce; Tamil Nadu's voice is being stifled. This is a matter of Tamil Nadu's rights." He reiterated the state's adherence to a bilingual policy of Tamil and English and vowed to resist any attempt at imposing Hindi dominance.

Centre 'sowing seeds of language war', will not allow domination of Hindi

-MK Stalin, Tamil Nadu CM

In a letter to party workers, Stalin accused the Centre of "sowing the seeds of language war" while stressing that Tamil Nadu would not permit any other language to overshadow Tamil. He recounted a recent incident where a young girl offered her savings to support the state's fight for linguistic rights, asserting that there are many young Tamilians willing to defend their mother tongue.

In a response to the DMK's protests, BJP state chief K. Annamalai questioned the government's stance on language education in state schools, highlighting discrepancies in language learning opportunities across different school systems. *—PTI*

Hypocrisy will not succeed, says Panneerselvam

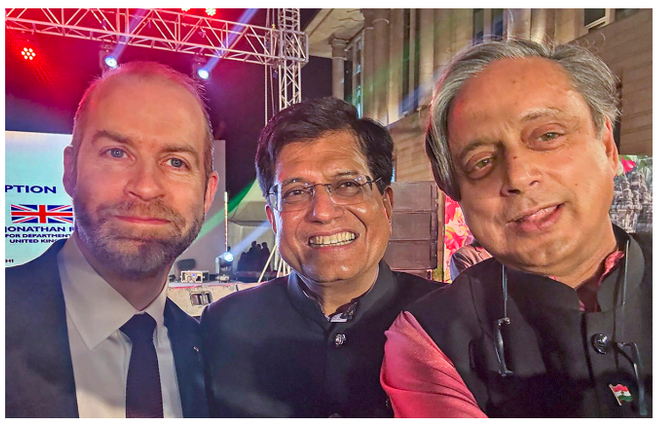
CHENNAI, 25 FEB

Expelled AIADMK leader O Panneerselvam has launched a scathing attack on former colleague Edappadi K. Palaniswami, asserting that "hypocrisy will not succeed."

In his statement, Panneerselvam reminded supporters that former Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa once likened him to Bharata, symbolising loyalty.

Palaniswami had earlier branded Panneerselvam a 'traitor' in a letter to AIADMK cadres, saying "a traitor and a loyalist cannot coexist." Panneerselvam retorted that the current leadership is leading the party towards imminent downfall, describing it as a "sinking ship." *—PTI*

A MESSAGE FOR CONGRESS?



Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor posted a selfie with Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and UK's Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds on Tuesday. The post follows an alleged souring of ties between Tharoor and Congress *PHOTO: PTI*

Cong slams govt over US funds for Pak's F-16s

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Congress party has expressed concern over US President Donald Trump's recent decision to allocate USD 397 million for the maintenance of Pakistan's F-16 fleet, questioning the effectiveness of the Modi government's diplomatic strategy.

Pawan Khera, head of Congress' media and publicity department, highlighted that this funding is part of a broader pattern of American military support to Pakistan that could jeopardise India's security, particularly given the historical context of F-16 use in regional conflicts.

Khera urged a reassessment of India's foreign policy priorities, asserting that the robust strategic relations established during the UPA administration (2004-2014) empowered India's defence capabilities and global standing.

He also raised alarms about current defence negotiations, particularly regarding the proposed acquisition of F-35 fighter jets, mentioned critically by industry figures, including Elon Musk. *—PTI*

'VILE GOSSIP & CLICK BAITS'

BJP forgave Preity's ₹18 cr loan, runs her social media: Congress

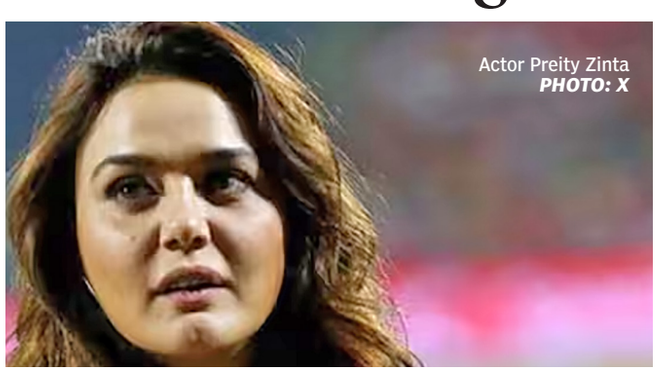
MUMBAI, 25 FEB

Actor Preity Zinta on Tuesday termed "vile gossip" an X post by Congress' Kerala unit alleging that she had handed her social media accounts to the BJP and got a Rs 18 crore loan waiver. The Congress Kerala backtracked soon after and said it was just sharing media reports and is glad to accept mistakes if any.

At the heart of the controversy is the Reserve Bank of India dissolving the New India Co-operative Bank's board on 15 February amid reports of financial irregularities.

On Monday, Congress Kerala's X account posted a news article with a caption that Zinta gave her social media accounts to BJP to get a Rs 18 crore write off and depositors are on the streets now that the bank has collapsed.

"No, I operate my social media accounts myself and shame on you for promoting



Actor Preity Zinta *PHOTO: X*

FAKE NEWS! No one wrote off anything or any loan for me. I'm shocked that a political party or their representative is promoting fake news & indulging in vile gossip and click baits using my name & images. For the record, a loan was taken and FULLY PAID BACK - over 10 years ago. Hope this clarifies and helps so there are no misunderstandings in the future," she wrote.

The "Veer Zaara" star also blasted journalists for spreading fake news and calling for accountability.

Congress Kerala posted a clarification after Zinta's statement, saying it was good to know that she was operating her social media accounts unlike other celebrities who have handed theirs to "the IT cell". *—PTI*

SP leader Abdullah Khan gets bail after 17 months

HARDOI, 25 FEB

Samajwadi Party leader Abdullah Azam Khan walked out of the Hardoi jail in Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday on bail after spending 17 months behind bars, with his party's leaders and supporters flocking outside the prison to welcome him.

Abdullah Khan is a former MLA from the Suar constituency in Rampur and the son of incarcerated veteran SP leader and former state cabinet minister Azam Khan.

Around noon, Abdullah Khan was escorted out of the prison complex by security personnel. While he did not speak to the media, his lawyer Satnam Singh Nattu said, "Mohammad Azam Khan and his family were persecuted and imprisoned. Today, we thank God, Allah and Waheguru for paving the way for Abdullah Bhai's release."

As news of the former MLA's release spread, his supporters started gathering outside the prison, along with Moradabad MP and SP leader Ruchi Veera.

Abdullah Azam Khan. *PHOTO: ANI*

MP-MLA special magistrate trial court Judge Shobhit Bansal recently granted Abdullah Khan bail in a case related to enemy property registered in 2020. Over the years, 45 cases, including one related to machine theft, have been registered against Abdullah Khan, and he has secured bail in all of them.

His release was delayed due to procedural issues related to bail verification. On Monday, the release order from the court was sent to Hardoi jail, paving the way for his release. *—PTI*

CPI(M)-led LDF wins local body bypolls in Kerala

T'PURAM, 25 FEB

In the local body bypolls held in 30 wards across Kerala, CPI(M)-led ruling LDF on Tuesday won 15, while the Congress-led UDF won 12.

The remaining three wards were won by independent candidates. The BJP-led NDA did not win any seat, according to the figures released by the State Election Commission.

The UDF claimed its seats increased from 10 to 12, while the LDF lost three. Hailing the UDF victory, Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly VD Satheesan said the results indicate a strong anti-incumbency sentiment among the people in the state.

Satheesan said the UDF has increased its seats in all the local body by-polls held in the state so far and these victories will strengthen it ahead of the upcoming local body elections later this year.

He also said that the people will throw out Left government, "which is characterised by corruption". *—PTI*

50 students fall sick after dinner in MP varsity's hostel

ANUPPUR, 25 FEB

More than 50 students suffered from food poisoning after consuming food at a girls' hostel in the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University in Madhya Pradesh's Anuppur district, an official said on Tuesday. According to some students, they experienced headache, stomach pain and vomiting after having dinner at the mess of the hostel on Monday. The students said they ate potato and cauliflower curry, rice, rotis and dal for dinner. At around 11 pm, many of them started falling sick. The students said they were admitted to the university's health facility. The university's acting Vice Chancellor, Dr Byomakesh Tripathi, said the students returned to their rooms after being treated at the institution's health facility. *—PTI*

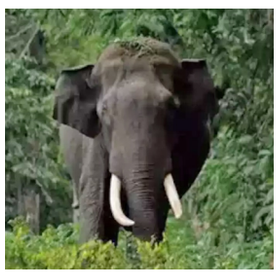


PHOTO: XXX

3 devotees die in elephant attack inside AP forest

OBULAVARIPALLE, 25 FEB

Three devotees died and three others were injured in an elephant attack inside a forest in Annamayya district in the wee hours of Tuesday, said a police official. "A group of 30 devotees who set off for Talakona temple were attacked by a group of elephants around 2.30am on Tuesday, leading to the death of three devotees and injuries to three more inside the forest," the official said. Of the three injured, one was in a critical state while the remaining two are out of danger, the official added. Police said the forest falls under Obulavaripalle mandal's Y Kota area and it is believed that up to 15 elephants were in the herd that attacked the devotees. *—PTI*

15 firearms handed over to police in 3 Manipur districts

IMPHAL, 25 FEB

Days after Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla urged the people of the strife-torn state to voluntarily surrender looted and illegally held weapons, at least 15 firearms were handed over to police in three districts, officials said on Tuesday. Four firearms, including one SMC Carbine with a magazine and one double barrel, along with three hand grenades, were surrendered at Singjamei Police Station in Imphal West district, an official said. One self-loading rifle was handed over to Andro Police Station, while five firearms were surrendered by people at Sagolmang PS in Imphal East district. The Manipur Assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation, said a notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs. *—PTI*

5 C'garh students plot blast against teacher; 4 arrested

BILASPUR, 25 FEB

The investigation into an explosion in the washroom of a school in Chhattisgarh revealed that five students, including three girls, orchestrated the blast by planting sodium metal to target a female teacher they are upset with, police said on Tuesday. A class IV girl student was injured in the explosion which occurred in the washroom of a private school in Mangla area of Bilaspur city on 21 February. Following a thorough investigation and examination of CCTV footage, the police detained four of the five involved students on 23 February. A fifth student, who had gone to visit relatives, is yet to be detained. The four detained children, all class 8 students, were produced in a juvenile court which sent them to the juvenile home, a police officer said. *—PTI*

Experts called in to rescue 8 trapped in Telangana tunnel

L&T joins GSI, NGRI in efforts on Day 4

NAGARKURNOOL, 25 FEB

The Telangana government has roped in experts from GSI and NGRI to suggest the way forward regarding the rescue of eight persons trapped in Srisailam Left Bank Canal tunnel after a part of it collapsed on Saturday.

As the eight remain trapped for the fourth day, experts from the Geological Survey of India (GSI) and National Geographical Research Institute (NGRI) have been included in the rescue efforts, an official said on Tuesday.

Nagarkurnool District Collector B Santhosh on Tuesday said before taking any step forward stability of the tunnel has been taken into consideration even as dewatering is going on.

Besides GSI and NGRI, an Australian expert associated with L&T that has vast experience in tunnel-related operations has been roped in to assess stability of the SLBC tunnel at the accident site.

Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka and Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy were expected to visit the accident spot on Tuesday to oversee the rescue operations, sources said.

Despite relentless efforts by the Indian Army, Navy, NDRF and other agencies, no breakthrough has been achieved so far in the rescue operations as the teams had to navigate through thick muck, tangled iron rods and cement blocks to reach the accident spot in the tunnel to extricate the persons from the partially collapsed tunnel. *—PTI*

NDRF personnel gear up for rescue work at the Srisailam Left Bank Canal project site in Nagarkurnool district on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

KERALA MASS MURDER

23-year-old kills five, including four of his family

T'PURAM, 25 FEB

The mass murder allegedly carried out by a 23-year-old man at Venjaramoodu here was "brutal" and there is "evidence of drug use" by the accused, police said on Tuesday.

A senior police officer said that the victims, including the accused's 13-year-old brother, had grievous injuries to their heads.

On being asked by reporters whether the accused used drugs, the officer replied, "There is evidence of drug use. The exact nature of the drug can be ascertained only after scientific examination."

According to the police, the accused – Afan – claimed to have killed six persons, but his mother survived the attack on her and is presently hospitalised. The other victims were Afan's grandmother, a young woman said to be his lover, his paternal uncle and the latter's wife.

Meanwhile, neighbours and relatives claimed that Afan was a good-natured, mild-mannered and soft-spoken person.

None of the relatives or neighbours could believe that the accused could commit the murders.

Neighbours and relatives said Afan was a good-natured, mild-mannered and soft-spoken person **PHOTO: X**

A woman who runs a tea-shop near Afan's home told a TV channel on Tuesday that the accused loved his brother and used to take care of him.

Similar responses came from other neighbours and relatives who could not believe Afan carried out the killings.

Afan's arrest is yet to be recorded by the police as he is presently hospitalised at the Thiruvananthapuram medical college after he claimed to have consumed poison. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

MUMBAI ON ALERT AS HEAT WAVE GRIPS N-W INDIA

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a yellow warning for a heatwave in Mumbai and surrounding areas on Tuesday and Wednesday. Maximum temperatures are expected to reach 37-38 degrees Celsius, nearly 5 degrees above the seasonal average, according to IMD Mumbai.

In addition, the IMD predicts a gradual rise in minimum temperatures across Northwest India, with an increase of 3 to 5 degrees Celsius over the next four days, followed by a drop of 2 to 3 degrees Celsius. In the plains of Northwest India, maximum temperatures are expected to rise by 2 degrees Celsius over the next 24 hours before decreasing by 3 to 5 degrees Celsius.

Central India and Gujarat are likely to see a gradual rise of 2 to 3 degrees Celsius in the coming days. Meanwhile, isolated pockets of Konkan, Goa, and coastal Karnataka may experience hot and humid conditions until February 28.

Minimum temperatures hovered above normal in Haryana and Punjab on Tuesday, the Met office said. *—Agencies*

DEVOTION BREACHES CONFINEMENT

Nearly 18,500 prison inmates across Chhattisgarh on Tuesday took a "holy bath" with water brought from the Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj where the Maha Kumbh is underway, an official said. **PHOTO: PTI**

SC seeks update on UC waste

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked authorities to apprise it about the precautions taken for disposal of hazardous waste from now defunct Union Carbide (UC) factory, involved in the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy in Madhya Pradesh.

The observation came from a bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih after a plea concerning the waste was mentioned before it for urgent listing.

The apex court had on 17 February sought responses from the Centre, the Madhya Pradesh government and its pollution control board on the plea which raised the issue of alleged risk to the life and health of residents of the villages situated within one km radius from the disposal site.

The bench said it would hear the plea at serial number one on 27 February.

"We are not going to stop it unless the apprehension is found to be well founded," the bench observed.

The hazardous waste of around 377 tonnes of the now defunct Union Carbide (UC) factory was shifted to Pithampur industrial area in Dhar district, 250 km away from Bhopal and around 30 km from Indore, for disposal at a plant.

Highly toxic gas methyl isocyanate (MIC) leaked from the Union Carbide factory during the intervening night of 2-3 December, 1984, killing 5,479 people and maiming more than five lakh others. *—Agencies*

SC reserves verdict on Assam 'fake' encounters

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Assam government on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court that the 2014 guidelines for investigating police encounters were duly followed in the state and unnecessary targeting of security forces was demoralising.

Following the submission, a bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh reserved the verdict on a plea seeking an independent investigation over 171 alleged fake police encounters in Assam between May, 2021 and August, 2022. *—PTI*

22 Indian fishermen released from Pak jail reach Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 25 FEB

Twenty two Indian fishermen released from Pakistan's Karachi jail reached Gir Somnath in Gujarat on Tuesday and expressed happiness on being able to return to their country.

They also urged the government to expedite the release of several other Indian fishermen still languishing in the neighbouring country's jails.

The 22 fishermen were nabbed by Pakistan's marines security agency between April 2021 and December 2022 from near the maritime boundary in the Arabian sea. Nearly 195 fishermen were still languishing in Pakistani jails, said Assistant Director Of Fisheries Veraval VK Gohel.

The 22 fishermen were apprehended by Pakistan's marines security agency between April 2021 and December 2022 **PHOTO: PTI**

Of the 22 fishermen who have been released, 18 are from Gujarat, three from Diu in the neighbouring Union Territory, and one from Uttar Pradesh.

The Gujarat government in a statement said Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and Agriculture Minister Raghavji Patel had requested the Centre for their release.

The fishermen reached Vadodara via train Monday evening after being handed over to Indian authorities at the Wagah Border a few days back, Gohel said. *—PTI*

5.1 magnitude earthquake in Bay of Bengal

BHUBANESWAR/ KOLKATA, 25 FEB

An earthquake of magnitude 5.1 was recorded on Tuesday morning near Puri in Odisha, officials said. The quake occurred around 6.10 am at a depth of 91km in the Bay of Bengal, they said. The tremor was recorded at latitude 19.52N and longitude 88.55E, an IMD official said. There was no report of any damage or casualty, a senior official of the Odisha revenue department said, adding that the impact of the earthquake was "negligible" as its centre was in the Bay of Bengal. *—PTI*

Class 10 girl delivers baby in Odisha hostel

MALKANGIRI, 25 FEB

An inquiry was ordered after a Class 10 student gave birth to a baby at the hostel of a state-run residential school in Odisha's Malkangiri district, police said on Tuesday.

The girl delivered a baby girl on Monday on returning after the board examination, they said.

The headmaster of the school, run by the ST & SC Development, Minorities & Backward Class Welfare Department, said, "Men are not allowed in the girl's hostel. We do not know how she got pregnant."

"Health workers are supposed to conduct weekly check-ups of all students living in the hostel. This incident showed that the health worker was not doing her job," he said.

The girl and the baby were rushed to the sub-divisional hospital at Chitrakonda, and then shifted to the Malkangiri district headquarters hospital, officials said. Both the child and mother were stable, they said.

The girl's parents sought to know from the school authorities how the pregnancy remained hidden till she went into labour.

District Welfare Officer Srinivas Acharya said it is likely that the girl might have got pregnant when she went home during vacation. "A departmental inquiry has already been initiated," he said. *—PTI*

INDIA'S FIRST HYPERLOOP TEST TRACK READY

Hyperloop is a high-speed transportation system for long-distance travel. The hyperloop track allows trains to travel at very high speed via special capsules in vacuum tubes. It will also run between Bengaluru-Chennai and Mumbai-Ahmedabad

From: Delhi to Jaipur in **30 Minutes**

Cost: **Rs 15 crore – 30 crore**

Developed by: IIT Madras with Ministry of Railways

Pod Length: **422 meters**, built at IIT Madras Campus

Speed Potential: Up to Mach **1.0 (761 mph)**

GAINBITCOIN

₹6,600cr cryptocurrency scam: CBI raids 60 locations in India

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

CBI on Tuesday conducted countrywide coordinated searches at 60 locations as part of its probe into Rs 6,600 crore GainBitcoin cryptocurrency scam, officials said.

The searches were spread across cities including Delhi NCR, Pune, Chandigarh, Nanded, Kolhapur and Bengaluru, targeting premises allegedly linked to key accused individuals, a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

The ponzi scam perpetrated through a web of platforms, including flagship site www.gainbitcoin.com, was allegedly masterminded by Amit Bhardwaj (now deceased) and his brother Ajay Bhardwaj, the officials said.

Launched in 2015, the illicit operation was camouflaged under the facade of Variabletech Pte. Ltd, they said.

The scheme lured the investors offering extraordinary returns of 10 per cent per month in Bitcoin over an 18-month period urging them to purchase the digital currency from external exchanges and deposit it with GainBitcoin through "cloud mining" contracts, the central agency said.

In its early days, investors received payouts in Bitcoin, fuelling the illusion of a lucrative venture. However, as the influx of new capital dwindled by 2017, the charade began to crumble.

The Supreme Court handed over the investigation to the Central Bureau of Investigation, due to expansive nature of the operation and the international ramifications it entailed. *—PTI*

HEAT IN ODISHA: BIRDS LEAVE NATIONAL PARK

KENDRAPARA, 25 FEB

The sudden rise in temperature and the onset of early summer in Odisha has prompted migratory birds to undertake their homeward journey from Bhitarakanika National Park after staying for around two months in the winter season, officials said on Tuesday.

Migratory birds thronged the water bodies of Bhitarkanika, known as the second largest mangrove forest in India after Sundarbans, in December last week to avoid the extremely cold weather conditions in far-off places beyond the Himalayas.

The birds, which flew into the Bhitarkanika water bodies from places like Siberia, have been leaving in batches almost every day, he said. *—PTI*

PRAYING FOR POPE

Thousands of people gathered in St Peter's Square to pray for an ailing Pope Francis, expressing sorrow for his suffering, hope for his recovery and gratitude for his efforts to steer the Catholic Church in new directions
PHOTO: PTI/AP

What German poll reveals about EU leadership

Germany faces its second change of leader in fewer than four years after the head of the centre-right opposition, Friedrich Merz, won Sunday's election, which saw a surge for a far-right party and a stinging defeat for outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

After the collapse of Scholz's three-party government in November, it's now up to Merz to restore stability to the European Union's most populous country and traditional political heavyweight, which also has the continent's biggest economy.

Merz faces a difficult task. But it could have been worse

Merz has one realistic option to form a government: a coalition with Scholz's Social Democrats. His Union bloc and its centre-left rival have a combined 328 seats in the 630-seat parliament.

He says he hopes to do the deal by Easter. That's a challenging timeframe: The possible partners will have to reconcile contrasting proposals for revitalising the economy, which has shrunk for the past two years, and for curbing irregular migration — an issue that Merz pushed hard during the campaign. That will likely require diplomacy and a readiness to compromise that often weren't evident in recent weeks.

It's still a much easier task than it might have been. For hours on Sunday night, it looked likely that Merz would need to add a second centre-left partner, the environmentalist Greens, to put together a parliamentary majority.

Friedrich Merz, right, leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and Markus Soeder, leader of the Christian Social Union (CSU) ***PHOTO: ANI***

Germany's traditional heavyweights erode further

The Union and Social Democrats were post-World War II Germany's heavyweights. But their support has been eroding for at least two decades as the political landscape has become more fragmented. Their combined showing Sunday was their weakest since the postwar federal republic was founded in 1949.

The Social Democrats had their worst postwar showing with just 16.4 per cent of the vote. The Union had its second-worst with 28.5 per cent. This is only the second time that the winning party polled less than 30 per cent; the first was in 2021.

Geographical divide: The far right leads in the east

The far-right, anti-immigration Alternative for Germany, or AfD, emerged as the strongest party across the country's formerly communist and less prosperous east.

That cemented its primacy in a region that has long been its stronghold, and where it won its first state election last year.

Other parties were stronger in only a few eastern constituencies outside Berlin. In western Germany, which accounts for most of the country's population, AfD trailed Merz's Union and sometimes other parties too but still polled strongly on its way to 20.8 per cent of the nationwide vote, the highest postwar score for a far-right party.

Young voters lead a hard-left revival

While AfD made the biggest gains, the Left Party made the most unexpected. The party appeared headed for electoral oblivion at the start of the campaign but pulled off a resounding comeback to take 8.8 per cent of the vote.

The Left Party appealed to young voters with very liberal positions on social and migration issues and a tax-the-rich policy, backed up by a savvy social media campaign.

It benefited from polarisation during the campaign after a motion Merz put to parliament calling for many more migrants to be turned back at the border passed. Merz's conservatives have long refused to work with the Left Party, so there was no prospect of it putting him in the chancellery.

Ukraine can still expect German support

Merz has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine as it fends off Russia's invasion. He wrote on social network X Monday that "more than ever, we must put Ukraine in a position of strength".

Germany became Ukraine's second-biggest weapons supplier after the United States under Scholz. Merz has at times criticised the outgoing government for doing too little, notably calling for Germany to supply Taurus long-range cruise missiles to Kyiv. Scholz refused to do that.

Merz, like Scholz, has been tightlipped so far on whether Germany might contribute to a possible peacekeeping force.

Where Scholz went wrong

Scholz pulled off a narrow come-from-behind victory in 2021 after presenting himself as the safest pair of hands available.

But his government's agenda was quickly upended by the Ukraine war and the ensuing energy and inflation crises. His coalition became notorious over time for infighting and poor communication.

Scholz sought another unlikely comeback. But too many voters, and even some in his own party, had cooled on the unpopular chancellor. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

'3 in 5 cancer patients in India die; woman more vulnerable'

Three in every five people in India succumb to cancer following diagnosis with women bearing a "disproportionate burden" compared to men, an analysis of global cancer data has estimated.

The incidence to mortality ratio in the US was found to be about one in four, while in China it was one in two, according to the results published in 'The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia' journal.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) study found that India ranked third highest in cancer incidence, after China and the US, and accounted for over 10 per cent of the world's cancer-related deaths, ranking second after China.

Researchers also projected that in the coming two decades, India will face a formidable challenge in managing deaths related to cancer incidence, with a yearly increase of two per cent in cases as the population ages.

The team examined trends in 36 types of cancer across age groups and genders in India over the past 20 years, using the Global Cancer Observatory (GLOBOCAN) 2022 and Global Health Observatory (GHO) databases.

"Approximately three out of five individuals would be expected to succumb to mortality if diagnosed with cancer in India," the authors wrote.

- Researchers also projected that in the coming two decades, India will face a formidable challenge in managing deaths related to cancer incidence

The findings also revealed that the five most common cancers affecting both genders collectively account for 44 per cent of cancer burden in India.

However, women in India were found to bear a "disproportionate burden", as breast cancer continues to be the most prevalent cancer, contributing to 13.8 per cent of new cases from both genders, and cervical cancer the third most (9.2 per cent).

Among women, breast cancer made up for nearly 30 per cent of new cases and over 24 per cent of related deaths, followed by cervical cancer, accounting for over 19 per cent of new cases and almost 20 per cent of deaths.

Among men, oral cancer was found to be the most commonly diagnosed cancer, contributing to 16 per cent new cases, followed by respiratory (8.6 per cent) and oesophagus (6.7 per cent) cancer.

The team also detected a shift in cancer prevalence across age groups, with the geriatric age group (aged 70 years and above) exhibiting the highest cancer burden.

Those in the reproductive age group (15-49 years) showed the second highest incidence and were related to a fifth of cancer-related deaths.

Further, the middle- and old-aged individuals have an 8-10 per cent higher chance of developing cancer with a 5.5-7.7 per cent chance of succumbing to it, the authors said.

The findings highlighted the urgency of targeted interventions and strategies to tackle the escalating cancer burden in India, with about 70 per cent of cases and deaths occurring in the middle- and older-age groups, the authors said.

The study is the "first comprehensive evaluation of the current and future landscape of cancer in India, focusing on different age groups and gender disparities."

The GLOBOCAN database provides estimates of cases, deaths and prevalence for 36 cancer types, including non-melanoma skin cancer, for 185 countries and territories worldwide. *—PTI*

Women in India were found to bear a disproportionate burden, as breast cancer continues to be the most prevalent cancer, contributing to 13.8 per cent of new cases ***PHOTO: X***

When the world's 1st airmail took flight during 1911 Kumbh in UP

On 18 February, 1911, French pilot Henri Pequet took off in his biplane from an exhibition ground, carrying about 6,500 mails and postcards and soared into the evening sky of Allahabad and into the pages of aviation and postal history.

This was the world's first official airmail flown by an aeroplane and the pioneering milestone coincided with the Kumbh Mela that took place in this holy city 114 years ago, according to philately experts.

The aircraft that became part of this historic flight, flew a distance of about five miles, crossed Yamuna and landed at a site near the Naini Jail in a span of nearly 13 minutes.

Among the recipients of the mails was a young Jawaharlal Nehru (later India's first prime minister) who was in England at the time, and George V -- the then king of the British Empire. Mails were also addressed to many royals and commoners.

Each of the mails carried a special postmark depicting an airplane, mountains and bore the text -- 'First Aerial Post, 1911, UP Exhibition Allahabad'.

Special commemorative photo postcards bearing images of the two-seater Humber biplane and the pilot and signed by Pequet were also part of the consignment, a prized collector's item among philatelists across the world.

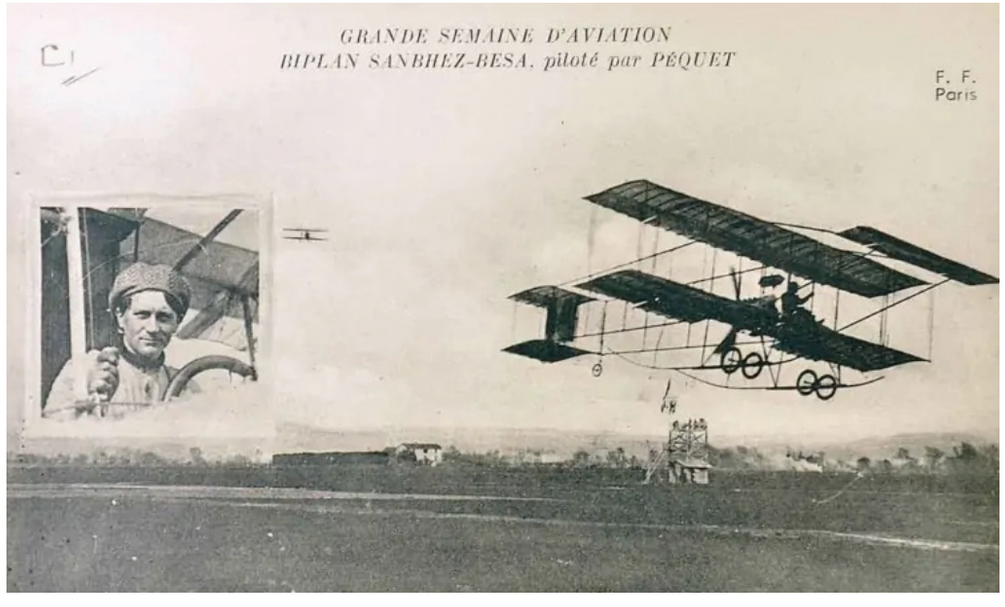
Unlike the vast multitudes of people gathered on the banks of Triveni Sangam -- the confluence of rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati -- in 1911 in Allahabad, now renamed Prayagraj, Pequet's arrival at Naini was a rather quiet affair.

According to archival records, the pilot who had to carry a compass instrument tied to his lap and the mail bag accommodated just near the edge of his seat, handed over the sack to a postal official present at the landing site.

From there, the letters and postcards were transmitted to their respective destinations by surface mail, as in by road or by ship or by train, as was the traditional postal practice then.

Prayagraj resident and young history scholar Akshat Lal, who has paid multiple visits to the ongoing Kumbh Mela of 2025, shares an exciting link of his family with the carriage of the world's first official airmail.

"I have a soft copy of a postcard flown on that aeroplane and it was addressed to my great grandfather 'Asharfi Lall, Esq.' and carried the 'First Aerial Post, 1911, U. P. Exhibition Allahabad' postmark in black, and the date mark '18 FE. 11'," Lal told PTI here.



Postcard of world's first Airmail Flight in India, 1911 ***PHOTO: X***

United Provinces Exhibition was held on a ground near the Allahabad Fort facing the Sangam, from December 1910 till the end of February 1911. Aeroplanes were showcased at the exhibition through demonstration flights. The province was later renamed as Uttar Pradesh.

An avid collector himself, Lal also has a physical copy of an envelope addressed to a person in Allahabad and carrying the commemorative postmark in magenta, over a rare half-anna postage stamp bearing the silhouetted image of King Edward VII, whose son George V was coronated in June 1911, and travelled to India to attend his coronation durbar in Delhi on 12 December the same year.

Noted Patna-based philatelist and author Pradip Jain, or 'aerophilatelist' as he also calls himself, said this historic occasion that accords India a place in iconic aviation and postal history coincided with the Kumbh, making it even more special for India and its people.

"Many of the mails were also sent to Bhagalpur and Champaran in Bihar region and I have a rare collection of a few of them, besides the envelope carrying the name of Jawaharlal Nehru addressed to him by his father," he told PTI.

Jain has written about this 1911 flight in his book "Indian Airmails: Development and Operations (1911-1942)", published in 2002, and said he also possessed a few "signed Pequet postcards".

A special stamp was issued in 1961 to mark the golden jubilee of that historic first flight.

"On the centenary of this event in 2011, the government of India had issued a commemorative postal miniature sheet. And, on February 18, this year I also delivered a talk on this subject in an online international seminar. In a fitting tribute to the 1911 flight, the seminar took place while the Kumbh was underway," he said.

The 45-day religious congregation began this year on January 13 and will culminate on February 26. Over 60 crore people have taken a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam since it started, according to data shared by the Uttar Pradesh government.

The magenta colour postmark for the 1911 event was made with a special dye manufactured in Aligarh. It is said that this dye was destroyed later to make the letters and postcards carried by Pequet, a rarity in future, and indeed these are today even after 114 years, experts said.

Jain, in his early 70s, said while the magenta postmark or cachet was a rarity, black ink was used "for the privileged few, while some had it both magenta and black".

The Ministry of Communication recently also acknowledged the 1911 event and its coincidence with Kumbh that year as perhaps the 'sangam' of postal history and spiritual heritage of India.

"These letters are living documents of their time. Many of these letters have transformed into pages of literature. While postal services now reach across the world via airplanes, their history is intrinsically linked to the Kumbh and Prayagraj," it said in a statement.

"These letters defined the concept of globalisation in an era when travelling abroad was a distant dream. The airmail service not only gave wings to the letters but also provided flight to people's dreams," the minister said. *—PTI*

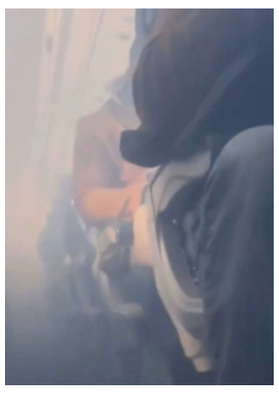


PHOTO: X

Smoke in cockpit forces Delta flight return to Atlanta

ATLANTA, 25 FEB

Delta Flight 876, en route to Columbia, South Carolina, was forced to return to Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport on Monday morning after crew members reported smoke in the cockpit. The Boeing 717, carrying 94 passengers, landed safely with slides deployed for quick evacuation. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is investigating the incident. Delta stated that two passengers were attended to by EMTs after the emergency landing. It remains unclear if they were transported for further medical treatment. This incident follows a similar event on Saturday, when a Delta flight from Los Angeles returned due to smoke in the galley. *—PTI*

Elevated highway collapses in South Korea, 4 killed

SEOUL, 25 FEB

An elevated section of a highway under construction near Cheonan, about 90 km south of Seoul, collapsed on Tuesday, killing four workers and injuring six others. Ten workers were on site when the structure fell, trapping them in the rubble. One worker was found dead at the scene, while eight others were taken to hospital; two later succumbed to their injuries. The final missing worker was discovered dead hours later. Five others remain in serious condition. The cause of the collapse is under investigation. Acting President Choi Sang-mok has called for all available resources, including 50 fire trucks, three helicopters, and 150 personnel, to aid in the rescue operation. *—PTI*

Pak SC to hear Imran Khan's pleas on 28 Feb

ISLAMABAD, 25 FEB

Pakistan's Supreme Court will hear petitions filed by jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan on Friday, seeking a judicial investigation into the May 9 violence and alleged rigging in the 2024 general elections. The five-member constitutional bench, led by Justice Aminuddin Khan, will conduct the hearing. Khan's petition regarding the May 9 unrest, which followed his arrest by paramilitary Rangers, was filed in December 2023. The violence resulted in damage to military installations, which Khan's party claims was part of a political plot against him. Khan also requested a judicial commission to probe alleged election rigging, a claim rejected by the government. Khan has been imprisoned since August 2023. *—PTI*

Scientists discover 3-billion-year-old beach on Mars

PERTH, 25 FEB

A new study, based on data from China's Zhurong rover, suggests Mars once had an ocean. The rover, active from 2021 to 2022, investigated an area near the Utopia Planitia basin, uncovering beach deposits from billions of years ago. Ground-penetrating radar revealed sedimentary rock layers consistent with coastal environments on Earth, supporting the theory of a Martian ocean. The discovery challenges previous assumptions that Mars dried up early, indicating surface water may have persisted into the Late Hesperian period, potentially offering habitable conditions. This study, led by Jianhui Li from Guangzhou University, adds to growing evidence that water played a crucial role in Mars' history. *—PTI*

Deal with Russia shouldn't be Ukraine's surrender: Macron

Trump, French Prez discuss ways to end 3-year-old war

WASHINGTON, 25 FEB

President Donald Trump expressed hope that Russia's war in Ukraine is nearing an endgame as he met on Monday with French President Emmanuel Macron on the third anniversary of the invasion. But the French leader cautioned that it's crucial that any potential agreement with Moscow does not amount to surrender for Ukraine.

French president Emmanuel Macron has said a truce "could be done in the weeks to come", shortly after meeting Donald Trump at the White House where he told the US president a deal should not mean the "surrender" of Ukraine.

All of Ukraine was under air raid alerts in the early hours of Tuesday as the Ukrainian air force warned of a Russian missile attack. Neighbouring Poland scrambled aircraft to ensure air safety. Russia said its air defence units intercepted and destroyed 19 Ukrainian drones overnight.

Their talks come at a moment of deep uncertainty about the future of transatlantic relations, with Trump transforming American foreign policy and effectively tuning out European leadership as he looks to quickly end the war in Ukraine.

US President Donald Trump speaks with France's President Emmanuel Macron in the Oval Office of the White House on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

US REFUSES TO BLAME RUSSIA

While Macron and Trump made nice at the White House, their countries were at loggerheads at the UN. In a dramatic shift in transatlantic relations, the US split with its European allies by refusing to blame Russia for its invasion of Ukraine in votes on three UN resolutions on Monday.

In the UN General Assembly, the US joined Russia in voting against a Europe-backed Ukrainian resolution that calls out Moscow's aggression and demands an immediate withdrawal of Russian troops.

The US then abstained from voting on its own competing resolution after Europeans, led by France, succeeded in amending it to make clear Russia was the aggressor. It was a major setback for the Trump administration in the 193-member world body, whose resolutions are not legally binding but are seen as a barometer of world opinion.

The US then pushed for a vote on its original draft in the more powerful UN Security Council, where resolutions are legally binding and it has veto power along with Russia, China, Britain and France. The vote in the 15-member council was 10-0 with five countries abstaining, all from Europe.

The duelling resolutions reflect the strain in the transatlantic alliance and the tensions that have emerged between the US and Ukraine after Trump suddenly opened negotiations with Russia in a bid to quickly resolve the conflict. *—PTI*

TALKS IN ROME TO PROTECT EARTH'S BIODIVERSITY

BOGOTA, 25 FEB

The United Nations COP16 biodiversity conference resumes in Rome on Tuesday, with a strong emphasis on funding for conservation. The talks, which had to adjourn last November due to time constraints, aim to discuss how to spend the pledged funds and raise more to protect plant and animal life. Significant outcomes from the Colombia discussions included an agreement requiring companies benefiting from genetic resources to share the profits and greater inclusion of Indigenous voices in conservation. However, key financial decisions were left unfinished.

The goal is to raise USD 20 billion annually by 2025, increasing to USD 30 billion by 2030. Yet, only USD 383 million has been pledged so far. Experts express concern about achieving the financial targets, with key funding sources diminishing.

Oscar Soria from The Common Initiative cautioned that the financial goal is "completely off track," warning that the situation could turn into a "tragic Italian opera" if no agreement is reached. However, Susana Muhamad, Colombia's ex-environment minister, is hopeful that progress will be made despite a fragmented global political landscape. *—PTI*

Taiwan probes Chinese role in severing under-sea cable

TAIPEI, 25 FEB

Taiwanese authorities are investigating a Chinese-crewed ship suspected of severing an undersea communications cable in the latest such incident adding to tensions between Taipei and Beijing.

Taiwan's coast guard intercepted the Togolese-flagged cargo ship Hongtai in waters between its main island's west coast and the outlying Penghu Islands early Tuesday, according to a statement by the coast guard.

The coast guard had earlier been notified by telecommunications provider Chunghwa Telecom that one of its undersea cables had been severed six nautical miles (11km) northwest of Jiangjun Fishing Harbor.

The Hongtai had been anchored in that same area since Saturday evening, the coast guard said. From Saturday until early Tuesday, authorities in the nearby Anping Port in Tainan had sent signals to the vessel seven times but had received no response. After the Chunghwa Telecom cable damage report, the coast guard approached the ship, which had begun to sail northwestward, and escorted it to Anping Port.

Taiwanese authorities said the ship's entire eight-person crew were Chinese nationals and the case was being handled "in accordance with national security-level principles."

Taiwan Coast Guard surrounds a China-linked vessel over damaging an undersea cable *PHOTO: TAIWAN COAST GUARD ADMINISTRATION*

LIVE-FIRE DRILLS

Meanwhile, Chinese authorities said they began live-fire exercises in the Gulf of Tonkin on Monday, only days after Vietnam announced a new line, marking what it considers its territory in the body of water between the countries.

China's Maritime Safety Administration said the exercises would be focused on the Beibu Gulf area, closer to the Chinese side of the Gulf of Tonkin, and continue till Thursday evening. *—PTI*

ENEMIES' ENVY

A deep fake video of Donald Trump kissing Elon Musk's feet played on monitors in the US Department of Housing on Monday. The AI-generated clip appeared to refer to Trump's recent Truth Social post that read "Long live the King" *PHOTO: X*

Trump supports Musk as he roils federal staffers

WASHINGTON, 25 FEB

President Donald Trump backed Elon Musk's demand that federal employees explain their recent accomplishments by the end of Monday or risk getting fired, even as government agency officials were told that compliance with Musk's edict was voluntary.

Confusion and anger over the situation spawned new litigation and added to turmoil within the federal workforce.

"What he's doing is saying, 'Are you actually working?'" Trump said in the Oval Office during a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron. "And then, if you don't answer, like, you're sort of semi-fired or you're fired, because a lot of people aren't answering because they don't even exist."

The Republican president said Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has found "hundreds of billions of dollars in fraud" as he suggested that federal paychecks are going to nonexistent employees. He did not present evidence for his claims.

The DOGE last week published an initial list of 1,125 contracts that it terminated in recent weeks across the federal government. However, data published on DOGE's "Wall of Receipts" shows that more than one-third of the contract cancellations, 417 in all, are expected to yield no savings. *—PTI*

APPLE SHAREHOLDERS MAY REJECT DIVERSITY PROGRAMMES FOR STAFF

WASHINGTON, 25 FEB

Apple shareholders on Tuesday are expected to reject an attempt to pressure the technology trendsetter into scrapping its corporate programmes designed to diversify its workforce. The proposal drafted by the National Centre for Public Policy Research – a self-described conservative think tank – urges Apple to follow a litany of high-profile companies that have retreated from diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives currently in the crosshairs of President Donald Trump. A month ago, the same group presented a similar proposal during Costco's annual meeting, only to have it rejected. A similar outcome is expected during Apple's annual meeting despite the strident objections of critics. *—PTI*

Morocco says it bust IS cell plotting attacks

SALE, 25 FEB

Moroccan authorities this month arrested a dozen people they said were planning attacks on behalf of the Islamic State in the Sahel, a region south of the Sahara Desert, officials said on Monday.

The discovery of the terrorist cell and what authorities called an "imminent dangerous terrorist plot" reflect the expanding ambitions of extremist groups in the region.

Authorities did not provide details of the suspects' motives or their plot, beyond saying they planned to set off bombs remotely. They released photographs and videos showing officers raiding terrorist cells throughout the country.

The images showed weapons stockpiles found during police raids, Islamic State flags drawn on walls, and thousands of dollars of cash.

"Morocco remains a major target of all terrorist organisations operating in the Sahel," Habboub Cherkaoui, the head of Morocco's Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations, said at a news conference.

Militant groups have been expanding their presence in the Sahel, capitalising on instability in countries including Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Since French troops began withdrawing almost two years ago, the Islamic State in the Sahel has launched deadly campaigns and taken control of lucrative transit routes. *—PTI*

Heavy fighting cuts aid supply to Sudan's famine-stricken camp

CAIRO, 25 FEB

Doctors Without Borders on Monday halted its operations in Sudan's famine-stricken Zamzam camp due to an escalation of attacks and fighting in the vicinity.

The international medical aid group, also known by its French name Médecins Sans Frontières and acronym MSF, said fighting between the Sudanese military and its rival paramilitary the Rapid Support Forces intensified in the camp in North Darfur.

The escalation made it "impossible" for the group to provide lifesaving humanitarian help to thousands of displaced people, it said, adding it had suspended all activities in Zamzam, including at its field hospital. "Halting our project in the midst of a worsening disaster in Zamzam is a heartbreaking decision," said Yahya Kalilah, the group's head of mission in Sudan.

Kalilah said violence, experiencing great difficulty in sending supplies, dealing with the "impossibility" of sending experienced staff and the uncertainty around routes out of the camp, left MSF with "little choice." *—PTI*

UN's World Food Programme has temporarily halted food aid in some parts of Sudan's al-Jazirah state as fighting has spread *PHOTO: X*

DEATH IN 48 HOURS

Mystery disease kills 50 people in Congo

KINSHASA, 25 FEB

An unknown illness has killed over 50 people in northwestern Congo, according to doctors on the ground and the World Health Organisation on Monday.

The interval between the onset of symptoms and death has been 48 hours in the majority of cases, and "that's what's really worrying", said Serge Ngalebato, the medical director of regional monitoring centre Bikoro Hospital.

The latest disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo began on 21 January, and 419 cases have been recorded, including 53 deaths.

According to the WHO's Africa office, the first outbreak in the town of Boloko began after three children ate a bat and died within 48 hours following hemorrhagic fever symptoms.

The latest disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo began on 21 January, and 419 cases have been recorded *PHOTO: X*

There have long been concerns about diseases jumping from animals to humans in places where wild animals are popularly eaten.

The number of such outbreaks in Africa has surged by more than 60 per cent in the last decade, the WHO said in 2022.

After the second outbreak of the current mystery disease began in the town of Bomate on 9 February, samples from 13 cases have been sent to the National Institute for Biomedical Research in Congo's capital, Kinshasa, for testing, the WHO said.

All samples have been negative for Ebola or other common hemorrhagic fever diseases like Marburg. Some tested positive for malaria.

Last year, another mystery illness that killed dozens of people in another part of Congo was determined to be likely malaria. *—PTI*

French surgeon faces trial for rape of 299 patients

VANNES, 25 FEB

A former French surgeon, Joël Le Scouarnec, has gone on trial for the alleged rape and sexual abuse of 299 patients, most of whom were children under his care.

The trial, which began on Monday, examines abuse spanning over three decades, with Le Scouarnec acknowledging his crimes but disputing guilt in some cases. He faces up to 20 years in prison in addition to a 15-year sentence already served for similar crimes committed in 2020.

Le Scouarnec, 74, admitted to committing "odious acts" and expressed remorse, acknowledging the irreparable harm caused to the victims. Some survivors testified, with one recalling an assault in 1995 during a consultation when he was a child. The trial builds on increasing activism in France to break the silence surrounding sexual abuse, following prominent cases such as that of Gisèle Pélicot.

Activists demonstrated outside the courthouse, calling for an end to impunity.

Le Scouarnec's abuse, uncovered in 2017 after a 6-year-old neighbour reported inappropriate touching, was recorded in notebooks at his home. Investigations revealed over 300,000 images and videos related to child abuse. His trial will examine offences committed between 1989 and 2014 against 158 men and 141 women, with victims averaging 11 years old at the time of the abuse. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gold jumps Rs 250 to Rs 89,350 amid rupee depreciation

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Gold prices jumped by Rs 250 to Rs 89,350 per 10 grams on Tuesday extending gains for the second day amid depreciation in rupee, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose by Rs 250 to Rs 88,950 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 88,700 per 10 grams. On 20 February, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity hit all-time highs of Rs 89,450 and Rs 89,050 per 10 grams, respectively.

However, silver prices slipped below the Rs 1 lakh mark, falling by Rs 500 to Rs 99,500 per kg. In futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for April delivery appreciated by Rs 275 to Rs 86,459 per 10 grams. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 16 paise to 86.88 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

The rupee declined 16 paise to 86.88 against the US dollar in early trade on Tuesday amid a strengthening greenback, sustained FII outflows, and a rise in Brent crude prices. A rebound in the domestic equity markets prevented further fall in the domestic unit, according to forex traders.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 86.83, before sliding further to 86.88, down 16 paise from Monday's close of 86.72.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.03 per cent to 106.62. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, went up 0.51 per cent to 75.16 per barrel in futures trade. *—PTI*

TVS Emerald acquires 10-acre land in Bengaluru

CHENNAI, 25 FEB

TVS Emerald has acquired a 10-acre land parcel in Sathanur, Bengaluru, marking its fourth acquisition in the current financial year. This latest deal brings the company's total land acquisitions this year to a revenue potential of 5,300 crore. Previously, the Chennai-based real estate developer secured two parcels in Chennai—12 acres on the Radial Road and 4.8 acres in Padur, as well as a 4-acre plot in Thanisandra, Bengaluru. Sriram Iyer, Director and CEO of TVS Emerald, expressed that these acquisitions will strengthen their market position and contribute to their development portfolio, now amounting to 8.2 million sq ft. He emphasised that their strategic presence will enhance their reputation. *—PTI*

Maruti Suzuki opens new facility in Haryana

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Maruti Suzuki India has officially commenced commercial production at its new facility in Kharkhoda, Haryana. The foundation stone for this plant was virtually laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in August 2022. Initially, the Kharkhoda facility will have an annual production capacity of 250,000 units and will focus on manufacturing the compact SUV Brezza, according to a company statement. With this addition, Maruti Suzuki's total annual production capability, including that of its wholly-owned subsidiary Suzuki Motor Gujarat, will reach 2.6 million units. The Kharkhoda plant has an installed peak capacity target of one million units per annum, backed by an investment of Rs 18,000 crore. This marks Maruti Suzuki's third manufacturing plant in Haryana. *—PTI*

India imports €49B of Russian oil in 3rd year of Ukraine war

India's imports of Russian crude saw 8% increase year-on-year

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

PHOTO: FREEPIK

In the third year of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, India, now the world's third-largest oil consumer and importer, acquired crude oil from Russia worth €49 billion, according to a recent report from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA).

Following the onset of the Ukraine conflict in February 2022, India's oil imports from Russia surged dramatically, rising from less than 1 per cent of total imports to a notable 40 per cent. This shift was largely driven by discounted Russian oil, as Western sanctions led to reduced purchases by European nations.

The CREA report highlighted that the three largest purchasers of Russian oil—China (€78 billion), India (€49 billion), and Turkey (€34 billion)—accounted for a substantial 74 per cent of Russia's fossil fuel revenue in the last year.

India's imports of Russian crude saw an 8 percent increase year-on-year, contributing to Russia's overall fossil fuel earnings of Rs 242 billion in the third year of the invasion, totalling Rs 847 billion since hostilities began. Indian refineries have been converting Russian crude into petrol and diesel, which is then exported to European and G7 markets.

Interestingly, from February to September 2024, 65 per cent of tankers arriving at India's Sikka port were subjected to a price cap, which, if applied, could have reduced Russian crude revenues by approximately Rs 5.8 billion.

Despite the sanctions on Russian oil exports, the economic impetus for India is clear, with substantial price discounts making Russian oil an attractive proposition for its energy needs. However, these discounts have begun to diminish, narrowing to under Rs 3 per barrel in recent times. *—PTI*

MKTS CLOSED TODAY

Sensex bounces back after 5-day slump; Nifty ends lower

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

PHOTO: ANI

Benchmark BSE Sensex recovered 147 points in a range-bound trade on Tuesday, ending its five-day slide on the back of buying in financial and FMCG shares.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 147.71 points or 0.20 per cent to settle at 74,602.12 with 17 of its constituents ending higher and 13 lower. During the day, it rallied 330.67 points or 0.44 per cent to 74,785.08.

The broader Nifty of NSE, however, fell for the sixth day slipping by 5.80 points or 0.03 per cent to finish at 22,547.55 due to fag-end selling in pharma, metal and IT shares.

Weak Asian and US markets along with foreign fund outflows made investors risk-averse, analysts said.

Among Sensex shares, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finance, Zomato, Nestle, Bajaj Finserv, Maruti and Titan were the biggest gainers.

Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Asian Paints and Tata Motors were among the laggards.

In the last five trading sessions, the BSE barometer lost 1,542.45 points or 2 per cent.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 6,286.70 crore on Monday, while DIIs bought equities worth Rs 5,185.65 crore.

THE 30-SHARE BSE BENCHMARK SENSEX CLIMBED 147.71 POINTS OR 0.20 PER CENT TO SETTLE AT 74,602.12 WITH 17 OF ITS CONSTITUENTS ENDING HIGHER AND 13 LOWER

The Sensex had tanked 856.65 points, or 1.14 per cent, to settle at 74,454.41 on Monday while the Nifty declined 242.55 points, or 1.06 per cent, to 22,553.35.

Stock markets will remain closed on Wednesday for 'Mahashivratri'. *—PTI*

Tata Capital okays IPO, Rs 1,504 cr rights issue

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Tata Capital announced on February 25 that its board has approved plans for an Initial Public Offering (IPO), which will include a fresh issue of 23 crore equity shares and an offer-for-sale by existing shareholders. However, the company did not provide further details about the proposed public float. Founded in 2007, Tata Capital offers a variety of loans, including housing and personal loans.

In addition to the IPO, the board also approved a rights issue of shares worth up to Rs 1,504 crore for existing shareholders. This IPO would be the first by a Tata Group company since Tata Technologies' successful listing in 2023.

In December, Moneycontrol reported that Tata Capital was planning a Rs 15,000-crore IPO, involving both primary and secondary issuance of shares. Advisors Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas and Kotak Mahindra Capital were reportedly engaged for the process.

The IPO move aligns with the Reserve Bank of India's mandate requiring 'upper layer' Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) to go public within three years of being notified, i.e., by September 2025. Tata Capital Financial Services, which merged with Tata Capital, is on this regulatory list. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: X

'NO WEEKEND E-MAILS'

Capgemini CEO bats for 47.5-hr work week

Ashwin Yardi chief executive, Capgemini, India PHOTO: X

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

Joining the debate on working hours, IT services company Capgemini India's chief executive Ashwin Yardi on Tuesday advocated 47.5 hours work per week, and was against sending e-mails to employees on weekends.

He was speaking at Nasscom Technology and Leadership Forum (NTLF) here.

"Forty seven and half hours. We have about nine hours a day and five days a week," Yardi said replying to a question on the ideal time to be put in by an employee per week.

"My guiding principle for the last four years is don't send an e-mail on a weekend even if it is an escalation unless you know you can solve it on a weekend," he added.

Acknowledging that sometimes he does work on weekends, Yardi said he desists from sending e-mails to employees, as there is no point just to give "grief" to an employee knowing well that the work cannot be done on a weekend.

It can be noted that IT industry leader and Infosys co-founder N R Narayana Murthy has been pitching for a 70-hour work week, while EPC major Larsen and Toubro's Chairman S N Subrahmanyan called for a 90-hour work week.

Speaking at the same event, nasscom's chairperson Sindhu Gangadharan, who also leads German tech major SAP's India operations, said outcomes should matter more than the work.

Fast moving consumer goods company Marico's chief executive Saugata Gupta also spoke in favour of outcomes, and added that he does send e-mails at 11 pm as well. *—PTI*

> **My guiding principle for the last four years is don't send an e-mail on a weekend even if it is an escalation unless you know you can solve it on a weekend**
>
> -Ashwin Yardi, Capgemini CEO

India may miss 500-GW RE goal: Report

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

India may fall short of its ambitious goal of deploying 500 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy capacity by 2030, according to a new report by global energy think tank Ember. It warns that a 20 per cent increase in annual funding from current levels is essential to meet this target.

The report highlights that project delays—attributed to land acquisition issues, grid connectivity challenges, and slow power purchase agreement (PPA) signings—could inflate capital costs by up to 400 basis points. Such a rise in financing costs could result in India missing its 500-GW target by as much as 100 GW and lead to higher electricity prices for consumers.

Investments in renewable energy generation and transmission for the financial year 2024 are estimated at USD 13.3 billion, a 40 per cent increase from the previous year. However, to meet targets outlined in the 14th National Electricity Plan (NEP-14), annual financing must consistently rise by 20 per cent, reaching USD 68 billion by 2032, translating to a total investment of USD 300 billion.

Neshwin Rodrigues, senior energy analyst at Ember, emphasised that understanding project-specific financing risks is crucial for reducing capital costs. Meanwhile, the NEP-14 is targeting a total of 596 GW of renewable capacity by 2032, which is vital for meeting nearly 68.4 per cent of the country's installed capacity and 44 per cent of electricity demand. *—PTI*

Akzo India to sell coatings bizz

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Akzo Nobel India has announced plans to transfer its powder coatings business and international research and development centre to its Dutch parent firm, Akzo Nobel NV, in a deal valued at Rs 2,143 crore.

This move aims to streamline operations and strengthen its core focus on liquid paints.

The company's board has accepted a binding offer from Akzo Nobel NV, consisting of a Rs 2,073 crore slump sale for the powder coatings division and a Rs 70 crore transfer for the R&D centre.

The transaction is framed as a "going concern," allowing Akzo Nobel India Ltd (ANIL) to divest non-core assets while enhancing its position in the liquid coatings market.

As part of the deal, ANIL will also acquire intellectual property rights for its decorative paint business in India and neighbouring countries for Rs 1,152 crore.

The agreements will be executed through a business transfer to a new subsidiary of Akzo Nobel NV in India.

These strategic changes are subject to shareholder and supervisory board approvals. The process is expected to be completed by 31 December, 2025.

Last fiscal year, Akzo Nobel India reported a revenue of Rs 3,961.6 crore, and the latest developments follow a review of the firm's portfolio in South Asia. *—PTI*

'Key semiconductor policy vital for India's defence'

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, Chief of the Indian Navy, has highlighted the significance of India's semiconductor policy, labelling it as "the new oil for the economy" and crucial for enhancing defence manufacturing capabilities. Speaking at a recent event, he urged the private sector to take a proactive role in achieving self-reliance in defence production.

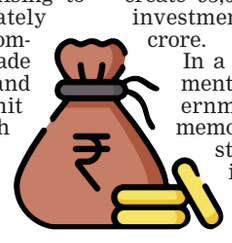
The Defence Ministry has allocated ₹150 crore this fiscal year for the Innovation for Defence Excellence (iDEX) scheme, which supports startups and small to medium enterprises in innovation. Admiral Tripathi noted that 75 per cent of the modernisation budget, approximately ₹1 lakh crore, is allocated to the defence industry, with 25 per cent specifically for the private sector.

The Admiral also underscored the Navy's shift towards collaboration with industry, stating the importance of partnership in meeting technological needs and embracing innovative solutions for the future. *—PTI*

TECH FIRMS COMMIT TO INVEST RS 25,640 CR IN MP

BHOPAL, 25 FEB

Madhya Pradesh has announced a monumental commitment from technology companies to invest Rs 25,640 crore, promising to create approximately 183,400 jobs. The commitments were made during the IT and Technology Summit at GIS 2025, with notable investments from 35 entities across various technology sectors. Electronics manufacturing will see the most significant influx, with Rs 12,350 crore generating 14,000 jobs, while IT and ITes sectors are expected to create 93,000 jobs from an investment of Rs 5,500 crore.



In a parallel development, the state government signed 19 memoranda of understanding (MoUs) in the co-operative sector aimed at boosting farmers' incomes and providing raw materials for private firms. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav expressed the government's commitment to supporting these initiatives, which include collaboration with major companies like Reliance Industries.

Co-operation Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang highlighted the implementation of a co-operative public-private partnership model to enhance the sustainable income. *—PTI*

ADVANTAGE ASSAM 2.0 SUMMIT

RIL to invest Rs 50,000 cr in Assam

Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani PHOTO: PTI

GUWAHATI, 25 FEB

Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani revealed at the summit that the company will invest Rs 50,000 crore in Assam over the next five years. This investment aims to enhance the state's technology and artificial intelligence capabilities, and Ambani noted that previous investments have already surpassed Rs 12,000 crore since 2018. Key focus areas will include green and nuclear energy, as well as expanding Reliance's retail footprint.

Vedanta Group

Anil Agarwal, chairman of Vedanta Group, declared plans to invest Rs 50,000 crore in the oil and gas sectors of Assam and Tripura over the next three to four years. This initiative aims to create both direct and indirect employment opportunities for around 100,000 youths in the region.

JSW

JSW Group chairman Sajjan Jindal announced the company's plans to invest in cement manufacturing, renewable, and thermal power sectors in Assam during the Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit.

Expressing his personal connection to the region, Jindal highlighted the strategic importance of the Northeast in India's economic growth.

He stated, "We are looking into investment opportunities in the cement manufacturing sector" and affirmed the group's commitment to building the largest thermal power plant in the area to meet rising energy demands. *—PTI*

> **Assam's contribution to the country's growth is increasing and it now boasts an economy of around Rs 6 lakh crore**
>
> -Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in Guwahati PHOTO: PTI

'ASSAM AIMS FOR $143B ECONOMY'

GUWAHATI, 25 FEB

Assam's Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has announced the state's ambition to achieve a USD 143 billion economy by 2030, urging investors to participate in its growth journey. Speaking at the 'Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit', Sarma highlighted the remarkable transformation of Assam from a region once regarded as "the most disturbed" to one of "the most peaceful".

He noted that Assam's economy has experienced a resurgence. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Matthew Mott appointed DC assistant coach

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Former England white-ball coach Matthew Mott was on Tuesday appointed assistant coach of IPL franchise Delhi Capitals for the upcoming season. The 51-year-old Mott will assist former India cricketer Hemang Badani, who was named head coach in October last year. The Australian joins director of cricket Venugopal Rao and bowling coach Munaf Patel in the Delhi Capitals' support staff. Mott, following an extremely successful stint with the Australian women's cricket team he guided them to two T20 World Cups, one ODI World Cup, and four Ashes series wins over seven years. Delhi Capitals will open their IPL campaign against LSG in Visakhapatnam on 24 March.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Our team will not give up the fight: Mikel Arteta

LONDON, 25 FEB

In a bold statement at his press conference, Arteta declared, "Over my dead body will we give up on the title race. If not, I will go home. Mathematically it is still possible. You are there, and you have to play every game. Just three days ago, we were in a position to close the gap, and now we're just one and a half games away. It doesn't matter. We have to keep going." Acknowledging the growing challenge, Arteta emphasized the magnitude of the task at hand. "The difficulty is much higher now, but to win the Premier League, you have to do something special. With the circumstances we face, if we are to win the title, we will have to accomplish something no one else has done in Premier League history."
—*PTI*

ASMITA Rowing League: Historic start in Hyderabad

HYDERABAD, 30 OCT

The Hussain Sagar Lake here will stage the country's first-ever city-based rowing league ASMITA Rowing League from 26 February in what could be a huge fillip to the sport. Backed by the Government of India's Khelo India mission, the league will see participation by eight teams Bhopal Waves Queen, Chennai Ranis, Cochin Queens, Cuttack Rowing, Deccan Queen Pune, Hyderabad Queen, Kolkata R-Oars and Ludhiana Team Rowing and 250 girls in U-19 and U-23 age groups and five different events. Organized in collaboration with the Rowing Federation of India, the tournament will also reward the top finishers in each event Single Sculls (W1x), Double Sculls (W2x), Quadruple Sculls (W4x), Coxless Pairs (W2) and Coxless Fours (W4) with attractive cash incentives. National chief coach Ismail Baig, who has accompanied the Indian team to five Olympic Games.—*PTI*

Yuki-Popyrin pair stuns world No.1 duo in Dubai

DUBAI, 25 FEB

India's Yuki Bhambri and his Australian partner Alexei Popyrin combined brilliantly to stun the world number one pair of Marcelo Arevalo and Mate Pavic in their men's doubles round of 16 match at the Dubai Tennis Championships here on Tuesday. After dropping the first set, Bhambri and Popyrin staged an incredible comeback to defeat the top seeds from El Salvador and Croatia 4-6 7-6(1), 10-3.
—*PTI*

Eng, Afghanistan eye victory to stay in CT

England's Brydon Carse has been ruled out

LAHORE, 25 FEB

A battered England will hope to keep their Champions Trophy hopes alive when they face a dangerous Afghanistan in a crucial group B match here on Wednesday.

A defeat here would severely dent both the teams' dreams of a semifinal berth in the tournament, as South Africa and Australia have already notched up two points. The days of England's white-ball supremacy are far behind now, as the former world champions' creaking unit even failed to defend a 350-plus total against Australia in their tournament opener.

Eng vs Afghanistan Match starts at 2.30 Pm IST

Afghanistan's three-pronged spin attack, consisting of Rashid Khan, Noor Ahmad, and Nabi, has the potential to trouble even the best, and England batters' recent outings against slow bowlers are not confidence-inspiring either. England also suffered a setback as all-rounder Brydon Carse has been ruled out of the tournament with a toe injury. He has been replaced by leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed to strengthen their spin department. This move will also provide Adil Rashid with proper backing, as, until now, Liam had been performing that role with his mixed bag of off-spin, leg-spin, and seam-up deliveries. But England's real problem lies in the patchy form of opener Phil Salt and Harry in the middle-order.
—*PTI*

Gill is next big thing in international cricket: Amla

NAVI MUMBAI, 25 FEB

South Africa batting great Hashim Amla on Tuesday labeled India opener Shubman Gill, who has had an "exceptional" start to ODIs, as the "next big thing" in international cricket along with Rishabh Pant and Ryan Rickelton.

The 25-year-old Gill named India's vice-captain for the Champions Trophy, retook the No. 1 spot in the ODI rankings for batters on the opening day of the tournament after his ascent to the top for the first time in 2023.Gill began with a match-winning century against Bangladesh and struck a vital 46 against Pakistan to steer India to two wins in as many games in Dubai.

For India, you have got Shubham Gill; Rishabh Pant has been around for a while. For South Africa, we have Ryan Rickelton who has done well of late, Amla, who is playing for South Africa Masters in the International Masters League, told PTI Videos in an exclusive interaction."Every country has about 2-3 cricketers who are going to come through and I think that's pretty normal, that you see that every five years some youngster poke in the head through international cricket and possibly be the next best, big thing," he added.

Talking further about Gill, Amla said, "He is a brilliant player, the way he started in one-day cricket, he has been exceptional. He has been a huge part of India's success at the top of the order."
—*PTI*

Pakistan would struggle to beat even a second-string Indian team

-Sunil Gavaskar
Former Indian captain

India has a huge advantage: Cummins

LAHORE, 25 FEB

Injured Australia captain Pat Cummins believes India has a "huge advantage" to be based in Dubai for the ongoing Champions Trophy while other sides criss-cross Pakistan for their group games in the tournament being held under a 'hybrid model'.

Rohit Sharma's men are playing all their matches in Dubai and even the final will be held there if the team goes the distance.
—*PTI*

RAIN LEADS TO NO RESULT

The Champions Trophy match between Australia and South Africa was abandoned here on Tuesday due to persistent rain, forcing the two Group B heavyweights to share a point each. The weather did not allow even the toss to be completed. With the conditions not getting any better, the match officials called off the game a little more than three hours after the scheduled start time.The cut-off time for the game was 7.32 pm but the officials made the call much earlier with no weather improvement in sight. —PTI

CHAMPIONS TROPHY

GROUP A	M	W	L	PT
1. NZ	2	2	0	4
2. IND	2	2	0	4
3. BAN	2	0	2	0
4. PAK	2	0	2	0
GROUP B	**M**	**W**	**L**	**PT**
1. SA	2	1	0	3
2. AUS	2	1	0	3
3. ENG	1	0	1	0
4. AFG	1	0	1	0

Rain abounded the match between Australia and South Africa, in Rawalpindi PHOTO: PTI

Rachin Ravindra scripts history

LAHORE, 25 FEB

Rachin Ravindra and ICC events continue to grow, with the Kiwi star scoring a century on his Champions Trophy debut. The batter stitched his innings with patience and reached the triple-digit score in yet another ICC outing. In the process, Ravindra shattered multiple records. He also became the first batter in the game's history to score a century on both his ODI WC.
—*PTI*

Indian women's hockey team stuns Netherlands

BHUBANESWAR, 25 FEB

The Indian women's hockey team on Tuesday stunned reigning Olympic champions Netherlands in the shootout after the two sides were locked 2-2 in regulation time to end their home leg of the FIH Pro League on a winning note here.

Pien Sanders (17th minute) and Fay van der Elst (28th) had given the Netherlands a 2-0 lead at halftime but India made a strong comeback to restore parity through stunning goals from Deepika (35th) and Baljeet Kaur (43rd).

In the shootout, Deepika and Mumtaz Khan found the target for India while Marijn Veen was the lone scorer for the Netherlands. The home team had lost to the same opponents 2-4 in the first leg on Monday.

In the eight matches played in the home leg from February 15, India won three, including Tuesday's, and lost five, including one in the shootout.
—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

RANJI TROPHY FINAL

Vidarbha bank on form and home advantage against Kerala

NAGPUR, 25 FEB

Former winners Vidarbha will rely on their red-hot form to stake claim for a title that they last won over five years ago, while first-time finalists Kerala will be driven by grit when the two contrasting teams clash in the summit showdown for the 90th Ranji Trophy, starting here on Wednesday.

It has been nothing short of a stellar run for the Akshay Wadkar-led Vidarbha side this season, winning eight of their nine matches so far and drawing one which makes them the side to beat.

PHOTO: PTI

Vidarbha emerged from their group stage with six victories in seven matches and won each of the knockouts by heavy margins by 198 runs against Tamil Nadu in the quarterfinal and by 80 runs against defending champions Mumbai in the semifinal.

The winners of 2017-18 and 2018-19 edition, Vidarbha are making their fourth appearance in the final after losing in the final last year to Mumbai, displaying unmatched consistency in red-ball cricket. They had also played in the final of the Vijay Hazare Trophy this season.

Yash Rathod has been at the forefront of their batting with 933 runs in nine matches at 58.13 with five tons and three fifties the third-highest overall this season.
—*PTI*

Sana Mir PHOTO: PCB

EVEN DHONI CANNOT DO ANYTHING WITH THIS PAK SIDE: SANA

KARACHI, 25 FEB

Former Pakistan women's captain Sana Mir has joined the chorus of criticism against the men's cricket team for its early exit from the Champions Trophy, saying that even a talisman-like Mahendra Singh Dhoni cannot change the fortunes of the embattled side.

Hosts Pakistan were eliminated from the ongoing eight-team Champions Trophy after humiliating defeats to New Zealand and arch-foes India. "The 15 that have been selected (in Champions Trophy squad), even if you make MS Dhoni or (former Pakistan skipper) Younis Khan captain, nobody can do anything to the team because it has not been selected based on the playing conditions," said Mir on 'Game On Hai' program. In an unprecedented move, over 100 policemen of Pakistan's Punjab Police have been dismissed from service for refusing to perform assigned security duties during the ongoing ICC Champions Trophy 2025, police said on Tuesday.

"I was watching the match when I got a message from a friend that India is 100 for 2 'I think it's over'.

So, I said the match was over when the squad was announced," said the 39-year-old cricketer-turned-commentator. Mir, who played more than 300 white-ball games mainly as a right-arm spinner, said Pakistan had not selected the team based on the conditions.
—*PTI*

Bengaluru FC enters ISL playoffs, knocks out Chennaiyin FC

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Rahul Bheke's 37th-minute winner helped Bengaluru FC notch up a narrow 1-0 win and seal an Indian Super League playoffs berth at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium here on Tuesday.

After Ryan Williams was needlessly fouled by D. Vignesh, the Aussie sent a superb delivery from the resulting set-piece. Defender Bheke, unmarked and free, made a well-disguised run at the far post to bury the ball in with a flourish.

The result sent BFC third in the table (22 matches, 37 points) a position it will want to retain, for finishing third or fourth will ensure that the single-legged playoffs match will be at home. On the other hand, Owen Coyle's Chennaiyin stands eliminated from the race.

Interestingly, despite not being a better team, Chennaiyin could have walked away with full points, but for forwards Wilmar Gil's and Daniel Chukwu's profligacy. The former missed a free header from point-blank range on the stroke of half-time while the latter sent the ball wide from six yards out on 83 minutes. But for those chances, BFC boss Gerard Zaragoza should be happy. There were flowing moves and slick passing maneuvers among the front three of Alberto Noguera, Williams, and Edgar Mendez.
—*PTI*

Rahul Bheke celebrates with teammates after scoring Bengaluru FC's opening goal against Chennaiyin FC PHOTO: ISL/FSDL

Praggu hot favourite to win Prague Masters

PRAGUE, 25 FEB

Fresh off his nail-biting victory at the Tata Steel Masters, Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa will start as the hot favorite to win the Prague Masters, which gets underway here on Wednesday.

It was a grueling first-place finish at the Tata Steel Masters, where Praggnanandhaa overcame world champion D Gukesh in a nerve-wracking tie-break battle and the Indian will now look to carry that momentum forward in this tournament.

Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram makes his debut in elite chess, thanks to his consistent rise in both performance and rating throughout last year.

Having elevated himself to 2730 points in live ratings, Aravindh is knocking on the door of the top 20 in the world rankings and is currently ranked fifth in the country, behind Gukesh, Arjun Erigaisi, Praggnanandhaa, and five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand.

The field, as usual, is an interesting mix. Chinese Grandmaster Wei Yi starts as the top seed, with Praggnanandhaa in second place based on ratings released on February 1. Le Quang Liem of Vietnam is seeded third, ahead of Vincent Keymer of Germany, while Aravindh is seeded fourth in the 10-player, 9-round all-play-all event. The first round of both sections will start on Wednesday, with the drawing of lots scheduled for Tuesday evening.
—*PTI*

SERIE A

Saelemaekers scores as Roma beat Monza 4–0

ROME, 25 JAN

Roma beat last-placed Monza 4-0 to extend its unbeaten Serie A run to 10 games and deepen the Lombardy club's already serious relegation fears on Monday.

The win will delight Roma coach Claudio Ranieri, who has watched his charges put together the best run of form in the league in 2025.

Roma has taken 20 of a possible 24 points since the turn of the year, a run anchored by the best defense in the league over the same period.

The home side went ahead in the 10th minute through Alexis Saelemaekers.

Three teammates lined up expecting a cross but the Belgian winger cut inside from the right and curled a fine shot into the far corner of the net.

Uzbek striker Eldor Shomurodov doubled its lead. Matías Soulé Malvano twisted and turned inside the box and Shomurodov headed home unmarked.

Spanish fullback Angelino made it 3-0 18 minutes from time with a low drive and Cristante added a fourth three minutes from time with a glancing header from a corner.

The defeat left Monza three points adrift at the bottom of Serie A.
—*PTI*

Australia submits EOI to host 2031 Men's Asian Cup

Australia has submitted an expression of interest (EOI) to host the 2031 men's Asian Cup, while Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan have launched a joint bid for the continental showpiece. Australia, which hosted and won the 2015 tournament and will stage the Women's Asian Cup next year, submitted its EOI to the Asian Football Confederation on Monday, Football Australia (FA) said. "Football Australia is delighted to confirm that it has submitted an Expression of Interest to host the AFC ASIAN CUP 2031 Finals," an FA spokesperson said in an emailed statement to Reuters on Tuesday. "This important step reaffirms our commitment to advancing the beautiful game in Australia. —*PTI*

Galatasaray accuses Jose of making racist comments

ISTANBUL, 25 FEB

Galatasaray plans to start criminal proceedings against Jose Mourinho and file complaints with soccer's governing body after accusing the Fenerbahce coach of making racist comments after a Turkish league game.

The league leaders stated after Monday's 0-0 draw with Fenerbahce announcing the action against Mourinho, the 62-year-old Portuguese coach who moved to Turkey from Roma last year after stints at high-profile clubs including Chelsea, Manchester United, Real Madrid and Inter Milan.

Mourinho was fined and suspended earlier in the season for a tirade against local match officials and the league. His comments regarding Turkish referees and the Galatasaray bench following Monday's match between the top two teams in the domestic league sparked further criticism. In a statement, Galatasaray said Mourinho had "persistently issued derogatory statements directed towards the Turkish people." "Today, his discourse has escalated. We hereby formally declare our intention to initiate criminal proceedings concerning the racist statements made by Mourinho.
—*PTI*